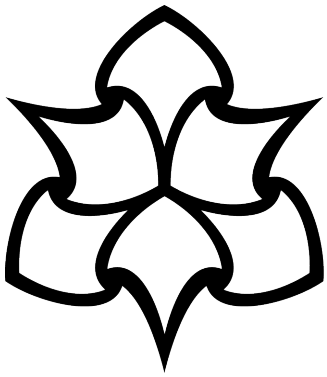

“Beautiful, Peaceful, and Fruitful”? (Re)Creating Ruskin’s Utopia in the Wyre Forest

Dominika Marta Wielgopolan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the
Manchester Metropolitan University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
Manchester Metropolitan University

2019

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how John Ruskin's environmental and communitarian ideas expressed in *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* have been interpreted and applied at Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest from the nineteenth century to the present. This thesis argues that it has not been possible to recreate Ruskin's theory, but that elements of his thought have been practiced by his followers there since the nineteenth century in more or less acknowledged ways.

The research utilises methodologies from the fields of English literature, history and social sciences. Beginning with a synthesis of Ruskin's environmental and communitarian thought from *Fors Clavigera* and a look at its first implementation in Chapter 1, it then quickly moves on to an investigation into how this has been applied on site at Ruskin Land. This is done over two chapters: Chapter 2 focuses at the beginnings of the settlement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Chapter 3 concentrates on the most recent (2000s-2019), and most environmentally informed activities to date there. The final chapter is an ethnographic case study conducted with the aim of understanding the people who become involved with Ruskin's Wyre Forest Utopia now and their take on Ruskin, Ruskin Land, and nature. The main thesis is supplemented by an appendix, offering readers the primary data gathered through interviews.

This research contributes to Ruskinian scholarship through the (re)telling of the story of his first settlement and by offering a new, interdisciplinary approach to his thought which merges literary and historical studies with social sciences, thus lifting Ruskin out of the library and into the field and confronting his nineteenth-century thought with twenty-first century reality at Ruskin Land.

Keywords:

John Ruskin, Ruskin Land, Bewdley, Guild of St. George, sustainability, community, Edith Hope Scott, WCLT

Acknowledgements

This PhD project would not have been completed without the involvement, support and kindness of people and organisations, all of whom I would like to thank.

Ruskin Land/Bewdley

Crucial to this project was the kindness, enthusiasm, hospitality and indulgence of people at Ruskin Land. I arrived there bewildered and in inappropriate footwear and was immediately accepted into their midst. My greatest thanks are due to John and Linda Iles, who took me under their wing(s), opened their home to me and untiringly explained and showed things to me, and who introduced me to so many more wonderful people at Ruskin Land and in Bewdley. I am amazed at how welcoming and patient everybody has been and would like to thank all, but especially Cedric Quayle for letting me pick his brains ad nauseam and leading me on to rare finds, Neil Sinden and Lynne Roberts for intellectual and moral support, Jenny Robbins and Yvonne and Richard Rundell for their time and kindness, Jeanette Lock for her generosity and hospitality. Thank you so much also to members of the Wyre Community Land Trust for their time and patience, especially Tim Selman, Kate Quinton and Sally Pendergast who let me interrupt their days and join in on tasks I had little skill to complete. Kate and Sally introduced me to WCLT's volunteers whose dedication and hard work are visible everywhere at Ruskin Land. I would like to thank this group for becoming my study participants and uncomplainingly enduring my questioning. And thank you to everyone else who participated in my study or, with good humour, let me sit in on their meetings, observe their work, ask silly questions and generally be in the way.

Guild of St. George

I would like to thank the Guild of St. George for their support and facilitating my research. I am especially grateful to Masters Clive Wilmer and James Dearden for indulging my curiosity and beautifully explaining Ruskin; Martin Green, Louise Pullen and Simon Seligman for making materials and rooms available to me; and David Barrie and Mark Cleaver for perspectives on the Guild and Ruskin Land. I

would also like to thank Stuart Eagles for his help with my investigative work and Ruth Nutter for inspiration.

Manchester Metropolitan University

I am very grateful to the University for the studentship award that enabled this project and for the pastoral care I received from University staff, particularly at the, now closed, Cheshire Campus. Thank you to my excellent Supervisory Team for your advice, patience and encouragement, particularly to my Director of Studies, Dr Rachel Dickinson for starting me on this journey and guidance throughout. Thank you also to Professor Janet Haddock-Fraser for helping me navigate the waters of social science research, to Dr Kirsty Bunting for her humour, sympathy and intense brainstorming sessions, and to Professor Rob Hulme for his advice. I would also like to thank the wonderful Library staff, particularly Julie Platts, for sourcing books for me from near and far and always having a kind word and a smile. Gail Spencer I would like to thank for organising creative activities to keep our minds healthy and Dr Martin Blain for untiring advocacy of student causes. I would also like to thank Dr Jennie Bailey for her support, enthusiasm and ideas as both a friend and University colleague.

Personal

I would like to thank my friends and family for the moral support and comic relief they have given me and for enduring the geographical separation that this project brought about. I am also incredibly grateful to my new English family for their acceptance and love, particularly to Steve who has been the best companion of a Companion I could ask for.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my examiners, Dr Paul Evans (Manchester Met) and Dr Mark Frost (Portsmouth Uni), and to Dr Angelica Michelis (Manchester Met) for chairing the exam.

Contents

List of Illustrations and Maps

Introduction

> It is close to ten o'clock at night and a woman is walking alone through a forest. It is dark, but her eyes had got used to the darkness and she does not light her torch; she knows, too, that whatever is out there can already see her much better than she could ever hope to see it. The forest is alive around her. The tree canopy whispers above, there is rustling in the undergrowth, a stream is gurgling somewhere close by, a bird of prey screeches; a strange quiet loudness. Not far now to that speck of light, the cottage door light, just one more bend in the road, the last one before a clearing. The path dips here sharply and the trees seem to hang above her, their night shadows long. But, she is not alone on this sheltered stretch of road and they both realise this simultaneously: a white doe is staring back at the woman, ghost-like in the darkness and straight out of a medieval romance. A moment of startled silence later and the animal is already on its way into the trees, the sound of its hooves beating the ground the only proof it was not an apparition.

This was one of many memorable experiences I have had at Ruskin Land. Like many visitors, I too was enchanted when I first came to the Wyre Forest in Worcestershire. The trees, the wildlife, the ambience have such an effect on many who visit there, perhaps because being in a forest is a rare experience for Britons. With just 13% of the country's total land area covered in forest,[1] Britain is at the bottom of the table compared to other EU countries (Forest Research; Europ. Commission). However, 13% is almost triple what it was post-WWI and II, and reflects a conscious continuous effort to increase forest acreage in the UK. This is heartening, especially in our twenty-first century reality of climate change emergency and planet-wide depletion of tree cover. We are now—in 2019—facing environmental challenges which require action from all of us individually and

[1] No up-to-date data is available on what kind of forest comprises the 13% (ancient semi-natural woodland, plantations, etc.).

collectively. This is the only way to ensure that the Earth is still habitable not only for future generations, but also for our own. It is disturbing to think that encounters such as the one described above may soon not be possible if we do not take decisive action against climate change now. An important part of that is increasing awareness of how we can use our resources, including land, sustainably. A place aspiring to lead by example in this is Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest.

That Ruskin Land is looking after its land sustainably for profit and conservation is only part of its appeal, academic and otherwise. The rest lies in the origins of that approach to land: the area's link to the Victorian polymath thinker John Ruskin (1819-1900) and related fascinating Utopian heritage. What is now about 200 acres of woodland, meadows and orchards began its life as a 7-acre wooded plot whose offerer and settlers had all been readers of Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1871-1884). Over the years many of these people, some of whom have been members of Ruskin's charity the Guild of St. George (the Guild), have been living and working there guided by Ruskin's ideas on living satisfying, sustainable lives. This thesis is an investigation into how Ruskin's communitarian and environmental thought has been interpreted and applied by his followers at Ruskin Land from the nineteenth century to the present. Began in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University's Cheshire Faculty in Crewe, the thesis, although rooted in English literature, is very consciously interdisciplinary and bridges into social science. The research project was designed to start firmly rooted in English literature as a discipline—beginning with a close reading of Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* and an examination of that key text's use of generic conventions of Epistolarity—, it was designed to expand from literature through history to social sciences. A significant aspect of the research plan was to conduct personal interviews and complete a mini ethnographic case study, with questions shaped by literary and historical research. This final stage of the research is analysed in Chapter 4, and offered as raw data in the substantial appendix.

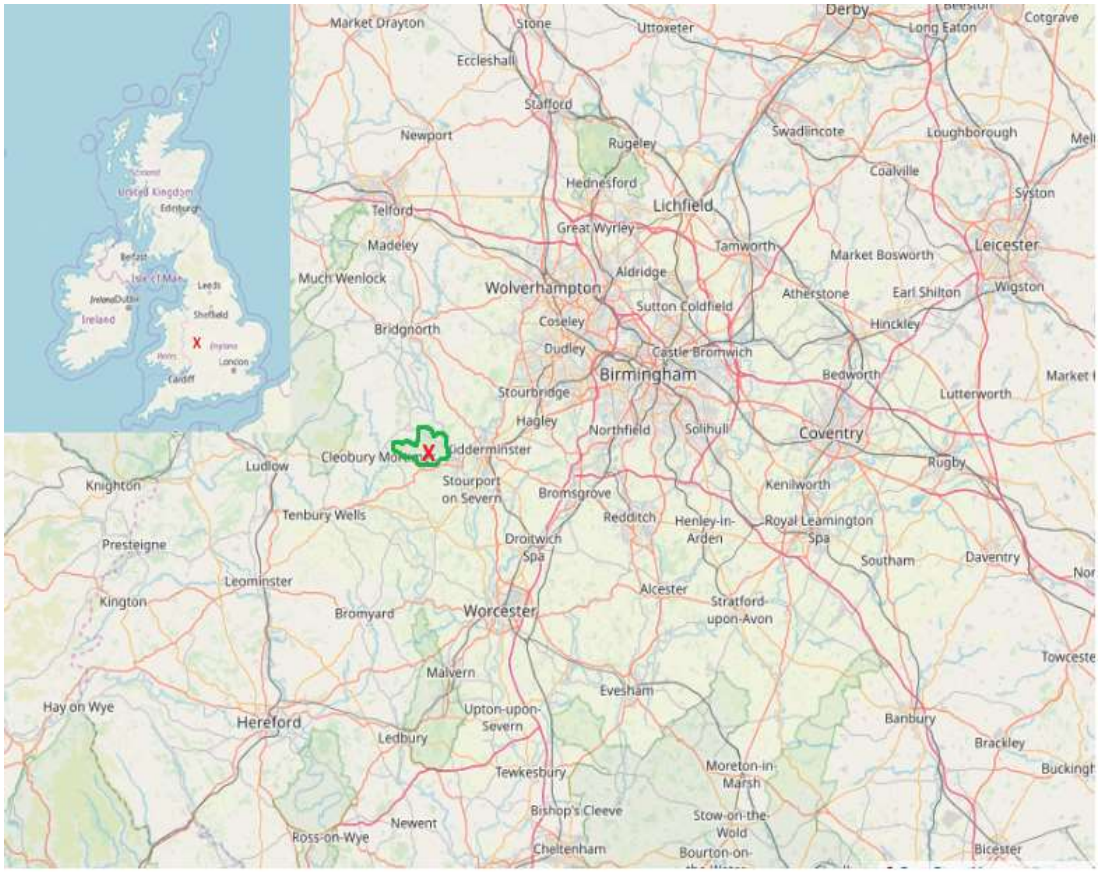

Fig. 1. Locating Ruskin Land: the red X represents Ruskin Land within the green boundary of the Wyre Forest. (*OpenStreetMap*, Dominika Wielgopolan).

The Wyre Forest is a 6000-acre area of woodland in the West Midlands and Ruskin Land is located near the town of Bewdley, Worcestershire. Variously referred to through the years as St. George's land, the Bewdley settlement or Ruskinland, the name Ruskin Land is now used by the Guild of St. George to indicate the 200-acre area of the Wyre Forest comprising St. George's Farm, St. George's Bungalow and Uncllys Farm with accompanying woodland, meadows and orchards. Ruskin's association with that part of the Wyre began in 1871 and within a few years of that, the small wooded plot increased in size, and, once cleared, became St. George's Farm. Ruskin's newly formed organisation the Guild of St. George formally became owners of the land in 1879. Although they did not own more of the Wyre until the purchase of Uncllys in 1930 and the donations of parts of neighbouring St. John's Lane in 1932 and 1994, the entire area was known in the Guild as the Bewdley settlement due to the presence of Ruskinians in the neighbourhood. Looked after by local Guild Companions, and bringing a modest but

steady trickle of income to the Guild, the Wyre land has now been owned by the Guild for close to 150 years and has developed into the site of one of its two main projects: Ruskin in Wyre and Ruskin in Sheffield (Guild of St. George). Acting as the Guild's land agent in the Wyre, the Wyre Community Land Trust (WCLT) is the organisation responsible for the day-to-day care of the estate. Affiliated with the Guild, but in 2019, a separate organisation, the WCLT made Ruskin Land its base and manages the area with an emphasis on community-building, and environmental and economic sustainability. In their own work, the Trust say they are inspired by "the work of John Ruskin, the Victorian writer, art critic and conservationist, who loved the natural landscape and cared deeply about rural livelihoods" (WCLT). Fittingly, the Ruskinian "Beautiful, Peaceful, Fruitful" was chosen as Ruskin Land's motto. The catchphrase is an extract from a passage in *Fors Clavigera* which can be seen as Ruskin's call to arms and is the main Ruskin quotation the Guild and WCLT have used at Ruskin Land: "We will try to take some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" (27.96). In Chapter 3 of this thesis I argue that this three-word motto can be translated into the three dimensions of sustainability where beautiful is environmental, peaceful is social, and fruitful is economic.

Sustainability is a word that Ruskin never used, but, according to Guild Master Clive Wilmer, would have understood (Wilmer. Personal interview. 25 Jan. 2019). Established as a development concept in the 1980s, it is many-faceted and difficult to define succinctly. In this thesis, it is understood to mean development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations 16). A kind of a modern Utopian ambition, the concept has been significant to environmental thinking about, for example, the value of natural resources, the time-scales of projects and the interconnectivity between environmental, social and economic concerns. As will be seen in Chapter 4 of this thesis, people of Ruskin Land have various understandings of the term "sustainability".

Ruskin's amalgamated views towards the proper organisation of social and economic life and humankind's relationship to nature found their expression in the major work of the sixth decade of his life, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen*

and Labourers of Great Britain. In this series of monthly letters published, with two breaks, for fourteen years, Ruskin scattered instructions, suggestions, dreams, expectations and opinions on how people should lead their lives to satisfy their economic, social and aesthetic needs. Simultaneously vague and specific, practical and idealistic, the gist of his plan was to obtain plots of land in the countryside, settle them with hard-working families with refined taste and prove that economic and intellectual fulfilment can be derived from growing your own food, making your own clothes and household objects—without the use of modern conveniences such as machinery or chemicals—and studying history and art. Theirs was to be life as if the world had come to a stop—my Chapter 1 discusses *Fors* and this concept of a stationary state (Albritton and Albritton Jonsson 31).

In his vision for England Ruskin was inspired by fictional ideal societies imagined by Plato in *Republic* (circa 380 BC, English translation 1763) and Thomas More in *A Fruiteful and pleasant worke of the beste State of a public weale, and of the new yle, called Utopia* (1516, English translation 1551). Acknowledging their influence over him, Ruskin borrowed, among other ideas, obedience, hierarchies and lack of social mobility from Plato and the need for everyone to work for their keep, living off the land and learning practical skills from More. One of many to base his Utopia on More's design and believe in its attainability, Ruskin claimed not to be building castles in the air, but to be returning to a state of things that had really existed in the not too distant past. His example were Swiss and Bavarian villages of the early 1800s whose inhabitants he saw as leading "entirely healthy, happy, and wise human [lives]." Those villages were "[not] a theoretical or Utopian state at all; but one which over large districts of the world has long existed, and must, thank God, in spite of British commerce and its consequences, for ever, somewhere, exist" (28.132).[2]

Determined to show that his plans were not Utopian but within reach, Ruskin set up a fund and a body to put his ideas into practice. Attracted by his vision and encouraged by his generosity—Ruskin gave money and other valuable

[2] Cook and Wedderburn's *Library Edition of John Ruskin's Works* is cited in text by volume and page number.

gifts to the fund—people began joining his organisation, the Guild of St. George. There were also some small monetary donations and gifts of land for his experiment. The very first was the already mentioned 7-acre plot in the Wyre Forest in Bewdley. Contrary to his other settlements, the Wyre project, despite difficult beginnings, survived Ruskin by 120 years and is more active now than ever before. In Chapter 2, I discuss what I believe to be the key reasons why Bewdley has been the only successful Ruskinian community, and I present new material, found through archival work, that may change the narrative of how the land was acquired.

That Ruskin Land in the Wyre was a still-functioning nineteenth century Utopia—or so I thought at the onset of this study—was a fascinating idea and a research opportunity I could not refuse myself. With a background in political science, I have always found Utopian social and political thought and attempts at its implementation captivating. The prospect of being able to investigate one such attempt in Britain, a country whose literature, history and culture had always interested me—who grew up in a Polish city—was attractive indeed. A Ruskin novice back then—and hardly less so now—I also undertook the project because Ruskin's environmental thought gave it another dimension close to my heart: environmental sustainability. I had been interested in nature and responsible use of resources from an early age and brought this interest with me from Poland, my home country, to Britain. At university here, I became involved in a student sustainability society with which I intended to involve the campus and town communities in joint sustainability projects. These would, I hoped, inspire people to lead more environmentally-responsible lives, so important in our current ecological crisis. I also wanted to see whether "green" projects such as growing food and upcycling would bring together the University and town and create one, sustainably-minded, community—as I had once seen happen many years before on my childhood housing estate. I am of the opinion that a sense of belonging to a community, the desire to look after nature and participatory democracy are all interconnected and I was keen to test this in Crewe. Activities on campus were to be informed by practice at Ruskin Land which offered a chance to study the three at play. In the event, the Crewe part of the project was dropped after the

announcement of campus closure and the political and policy aspect yielded to the social and environmental and had to be omitted in this thesis.

Initial research on the Bewdley settlement quickly revealed that its story virtually ended in the 1930s, despite the land having been continuously owned and presumably farmed by the Guild of St. George and its tenants. Some scholarship and other writing existed on the two first phases of the Guild's Wyre land: the books and articles of Edith Hope Scott (1921, 1931, 1935), Peter Wardle and Cedric Quayle (2007), Mark Frost (2014), and, most recently, Neil Sinden (2016) became my companions and invaluable sources of knowledge. Mentions of Bewdley by other authors were few and far between, but those other works provided the much-needed nineteenth and twentieth century contexts and scholarly interpretations of Ruskin's thought.

Allen MacDuffie's *Victorian Literature, Energy and the Ecological Imagination* (2014), although concerned with writers of fiction, helps place Ruskin within the context of late nineteenth century apocalyptic writing brought on by worries about energy and ecology. This side of Ruskin, and an inquiry into the origins of his environmental thought, is also investigated by Graham A. MacDonald in "The Politics of the Golden River: Ruskin on Environment and the Stationary State" (2012). In this lengthy article, MacDonald analyses Ruskin's social, political and environmental views and the resulting land-buying scheme. He also points out that Ruskin never in fact used the word "environment", using "nature" and "cooperation" instead (132). Understanding Ruskin's relationship with both concepts aids the reading of his *Fors Clavigera*, which may seem disorganised but is in keeping with Ruskin's style influenced by principles of ecology, as Mark Frost argues in his The Law of Help*: John Ruskin's Ecological Vision, 1843-86* (2005). Lack of organisation, unpracticality and the seemingly sudden turn from writing about art to social issues is also explained by Francis O'Gorman in *Late Ruskin: New Contexts* (2001). There, O'Gorman comments on Ruskin's seeming lack of efficacy and argues that the turn from writing about art to concerning himself with social issues was due to Ruskin's obsession with being useful. To demonstrate how Ruskin's thinking about social conditions developed from his interest in art,

O'Gorman uses the story of the infamous Hinksey dig project (1873).[3] According to O'Gorman, Ruskin believed that there could not be great artists in England because they did not have clean, beautiful landscapes to paint. Therefore, England had to be cleaned up. O'Gorman quotes Ruskin: "every human instinct . . . must properly be directed by the two ruling energies of Order and of Love" as this will "lead men and women . . . to deal with the earth, and to dress it, and keep it," making "gardens full of blossoming trees and softly guided streams," with waters always "pure, full of fish" (*Letter 5*, qtd. in O'Gorman 67). The undergraduate digging event was meant to be "a small gesture towards the wider restoration of order and harmonious national happiness" (68).

Opinions on the difficulty of understanding Ruskin's intentions and various contradictions in his life and work appear in many texts. Stuart Eagles (2011) notices some of the contradictions in Ruskin's life: how he seemed to think his writing had no effect and yet managed to spur people into action, how he was the Master of his own organisation yet claimed he was not qualified to lead it. E.T. Cook, the editor of the Library Edition of Ruskin's Works, quotes one of Ruskin's followers' disappointment that "the Master was not a true Ruskinian" because he used the railways extensively despite being their sworn enemy (27.xxviii). Brian Maidment seems especially critical and claims that the contradictions affected also Ruskin's followers—to him, organised Ruskinism was ineffective because of "three mutually destructive tendencies: a wish to honour a great man, an attempt to focus on that man's written work (which . . . insisted on action rather than study), and an attempt to apply ideas which had been vivid, active, and relevant in the 1860s to the changed world of the 1880s and 90s" (208). The Guild too failed as an organisation and Ruskin was to blame because it was "absurd" to establish "an authoritarian organisation that only he could understand, [but] claimed he was totally unfit to lead" (208). According to Maidment, Ruskin was not even able to "obey his own rule, that members should live by the work of their hands" (226). Maidment also criticizes the first Ruskin community at Totley near Sheffield,

[3] Road improvement work in the village of Hinksey outside Oxford. The road was often flooded and unpassable and Ruskin asked a group of his Oxford University students to rebuild the road. Although successful, the project, and Ruskin, were mocked by the press of the time.

repeating an opinion prevalent for a century after Ruskin's death. It was only with Mark Frost's discoveries published in *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George. A Revisionary History* (2014) that Totley can be re-evaluated. Ground-breaking in the world of Ruskin scholars, Frost's book finally sheds light on the difficult relationship between Ruskin and his followers at Totley and how this relationship contributed to, if not caused, the farm's failure. Everything written about Totley before *The Lost Companions* should be treated with caution. For example, although otherwise an excellent source of information on Utopian England, Armytage's *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960* (1961) devotes very little space to Totley and sees it as a failure—as does Dennis Hardy (1979) who at least mentions Bewdley as the first gift of land to Ruskin, but dismisses it as "7 acres of woodland in Worcestershire," which Ruskin appears to have taken no steps to "transform" (80). Bewdley does not feature at all in Hardy's 2000 work *Utopian England. Community Experiments 1900-1945.* Ruskin is also conspicuously absent from the 1979 work of Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, an otherwise comprehensive study of mammoth proportions.

Concentrating less on Utopias and more on the popular desire of going back-to-the-land in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, Jan Marsh's *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914* (1982) is an absorbing study of how well-to-do middle classes with a social conscience became inspired by Ruskin, William Morris and Edward Carpenter and began to look for alternatives to city living; the Bewdley Liverpudlians can be considered an example of that. Marsh spots some similarities between the late Victorian pastoral impulse and that of the 1960s and 70s (7). So too does Michael Wheeler who draws comparisons between the nineteenth century and the world of the late 1980s in the Introduction to *Ruskin and Environment: The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1995), a collection of essays he edited. Wheeler is interested in how many of the ideas Ruskin expressed in his own day on the issues we now consider environmental came to be true. Kevin Jackson, the author of *The Worlds of John Ruskin* (2010) believes that in the present day, "where only fools and scoundrels question the reality of global warming *Storm-Cloud* is . . . more urgent reading than

it has ever been before" (133). In this short illustrated biography, Jackson briefly looks also at Ruskin's influence towards the end of his life, when, despite (or perhaps because of) being virtually silent, his eminence grew among the working classes. Ruskin Societies were proliferating across Britain throughout the 1890s and Ruskin's works became obligatory reading for all those keen on self-education and improvement. By 1900, there was a national Ruskin Reading Guild publishing a journal and a college in Oxford called Ruskin Hall (later Ruskin College) founded for the higher education of working-class students. Stuart Eagles published what is perhaps the most comprehensive of all analyses of how Ruskin inspired the public-spirited of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (2011), Eagles argues that Ruskin's ideas found the most ground with men and women (from England and abroad) who were already involved in civic and social reform, some more famous than others—William Morris, Octavia Hill, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas K. Gandhi, to name just a few. Eagles also examines how, when and where Ruskin's disciples met and exchanged ideas, the "places and networks" that connected them (3). This book is of particular importance for researchers interested in the practical results of Ruskin's ideas and the organisations behind them—such as the Guild of St George. Eagles has written on the topic also in edited collections such as Casaliggi and March-Russel's *Ruskin in Perspective: Contemporary Essays* (2007) and O'Gorman's, *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin* (2015)—the latter an especially good reference book on aspects of Ruskin.

The most recent significant application of Ruskin's thought in this area is Vicky Albritton and Frederik Albritton Jonsson's beautifully-written book *Green Victorians: The Simple Life in John Ruskin's Lake District* (2016). Albritton and Albritton Jonsson look at how Ruskin's thought was applied by his followers in the Lake District. The book is also a short history of environmentalism, sustainability, and artisanship and how they were all influenced by the Professor from Brantwood, who, as did his followers, encountered many of the same questions we face today: "[Their] concerns, like ours, arose from the sense that life was becoming less, not more, fulfilling in the age of mass consumption," write the authors (9). The heroes of the story, W.G. Collingwood, Albert Fleming, Susanna Beaver, Hardwicke

Rawnsley, were all adherents of what Albritton and Albritton Jonsson call "a culture of sufficiency" (8).

Such were also people who at the end of the nineteenth century left their Liverpool lives and went to live in the Worcestershire town of Bewdley. Wardle and Quayle, authors of *Ruskin and Bewdley* (first published 1989, reprinted 2007) give an account of the life in the Wyre Forest where George Baker, the then mayor of Birmingham, offered land to the Guild of St. George. The area became home to several families who had already tried communal living in Wavertree, Liverpool. Bewdley proved to be, to some extent, a more successful Utopian attempt than Totley, and descendants of the original families still live in the town—for example Cedric Quayle, one of the book's authors.

Apart from a three-page final chapter of Wardle and Quayle's book, not much has been written about the life of Bewdley from the 1930s to the present. Guild of St. George communications such as Master Reports, newsletters and articles in the Guild magazine, *The Companion*, occasionally contain references to Ruskin Land. None of this Guild information is widely available in print, although some Guild context to events related therein can be obtained from Anthony Harris's *Why do Our Girls Have Large Shoes?* (1985) and James S. Dearden's *John Ruskin's Guild of St. George* (2010), both publications by Guild of St. George Masters, published by the organisation.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary contribution to the field of Ruskin studies and joins the discussion of Ruskin's legacy, influence and applicability rekindled in 2019 by the celebrations of the bicentenary of his birth. It is also part of a larger narrative of Britain's Victorian heritage, society's changing attitudes towards the environment and the history of the English countryside. It brings new evidence to light on the circumstances of Bewdley's procurement, and fills a gap in research on Ruskin Land's history post-1930s. This thesis is also an outlet for the people who lived and worked at Ruskin Land and allows them to express their views, analysed here by me, on what (re)creating Ruskin's Utopia in the Wyre Forest has been like.

In the space of four chapters, the thesis answers the question of how Ruskin's communitarian and environmental scheme set out in *Fors Clavigera* has been interpreted and implemented by his followers in the Wyre Forest. Chapter 1

concentrates on Ruskin's ideas for his Utopian communities and early practical attempts at their implementation. It begins with a look at *Fors Clavigera*, its epistolary format and Ruskin's environmental and communitarian views expressed within, including his Utopian plan for England. When writing about his plans for England, Ruskin acknowledged the influence of Plato and More, but did not admit that there had been others who had ideas similar to his, even in his own lifetime. Therefore, after a synthesis of Ruskin's plans, Chapter 1 offers a short overview of other British agrarian Utopias and compares and contrasts them to Ruskin's. Anticipating the move from theory to practice in the following chapters, Chapter 1 ends with a summary of how Ruskin began to implement his scheme through the formation of the Guild of St. George and acquisition and management of the first plots of land, particularly at Totley (Yorkshire). All analysis within this chapter is textual and concentrates on a close reading of *Fors Clavigera* as the primary source, with a literary survey of relevant secondary criticism providing context and informing the reading of Ruskin.

Chapter 2 considers how Ruskin's ideas were translated into practice in his lifetime and for a hundred years after his death. The focus is on Bewdley, Worcestershire, where the first plot of land was offered in answer to Ruskin's plea from *Fors Clavigera* and has been owned by his Guild of St. George since. The Wyre Forest settlement has had Ruskinians on site almost continuously since 1878, living by their interpretation of Ruskin's ideals. Chapter 2 then offers a shift in focus from Ruskin's theory to his followers' practice at Ruskin Land. The chapter tells the story of the settlement and the inhabitants of Guild land in the Wyre 1876-2004 and attempts an evaluation of the extent to which they, and the Guild, managed to adhere to Ruskin's principles. The focus is on community-building and environmental engagement set against the changing political and socio-economic climate of the twentieth century. The chapter starts with an overview of the location and Ruskin's connection to Bewdley and then is divided into five episodes arranged chronologically. The first of these is an account of the hardships of the first Guild Companion in Bewdley, William Buchan Graham who toiled at what is now St. George's Farm 1878-1886. Attention then moves to those members of the Liverpool Ruskin Society who populated Ruskin Land and neighbouring St. John's

Lane in Bewdley in the years 1889-1936. Next, Chapter 2 looks at the trying years 1938-1955 when World War II and difficult post-war reality took its toll on the Guild and its Bewdley tenants. This is followed by two more episodes in the life of Ruskin Land: the twenty years of calm between 1958 and 1978 when the first organised environmental projects began being implemented in the whole of Wyre including Guild land; and, lastly, the years 1980s-2000s which saw frequent tenant changes at Uncllys Farm and the first noticeable attempts by the Guild to have its Wyre land sympathetically managed.

This second chapter begins with a close reading of Ruskin's *Fors*, supplemented by recently-published secondary criticism (2014, 2016). The writings of Edith Hope Scott, one of the Liverpool Ruskinians who settled in Bewdley in the early twentieth century, enhance the narrative of the second phase of the Bewdley settlement. For this phase, as well as all the following episodes recounted in Chapter 2, archival research done in Sheffield Archives, the British Library, the National Archives and Worcester City Archive was invaluable. Tenants' correspondence with the Guild, Guild Secretaries' and Masters' Reports and accounts, Companion newsletters supplemented this, as did maps, WWII Farm Surveys, electoral registers, legal documents (financial reports and deeds) and old photographs. All these sources helped reconstruct a story of life at Ruskin Land throughout the years and answer questions that had not been answered before about Guild land in the Wyre, for example, how big was the original plot and at what cost was it obtained, who were the people who lived at St. George's and Uncllys Farms before and after the Liverpool settlers and what impact WWII had on the settlement? Secondary sources such as texts and audio recordings were used for geographical, social, economic and historical context.

Chapter 3 brings the story of Ruskin Land up to date. It recounts the most recent (post-2004) tenant changes at Uncllys and St. George's Farms, most notably the arrival of John and Linda Iles and their environmentally informed stewardship of Uncllys, and John Iles's gradual taking over of care responsibilities for the Guild's Wyre property. The chapter traces Guild involvement at Ruskin Land 2004-2019, its increasing environmental engagement there and its response to and relationship with the Wyre Community Land Trust. Established by Iles in 2007, the Trust's

development, work in the Wyre and ambitions for the future are discussed in this chapter and attention is drawn to the acknowledged and unacknowledged connections with Ruskin. The chapter considers the Ruskinian motto "Beautiful, Peaceful, Fruitful" used at Ruskin Land and how, in the twenty-first century, it can be translated into the three dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. It also reflects on this modern version of Ruskin's Utopia and the shift in importance from Ruskin's nineteenth century blueprint for his rural settlements to the twenty-first century needs of the land and its people.

This chapter is the first scholarly attempt to bring the story of Ruskin Land up to date. As such, it relies on sources collected and collated for the first time: Guild of St. George and WCLT documents (reports, proposals, surveys, board meeting minutes, correspondence); maps; websites and blogs; articles written by Guild Masters and Companions; TV programmes and videos about Ruskin Land; UK bills and laws for additional information and context. Invaluable were also the conversations I had throughout the project with former and present WCLT board members and employees, Guild Companions and Ruskin Land tenants.

Chapter 4 takes this thesis beyond the largely text-focused disciplines of English literature and history and into social sciences with the use of a mini ethnographic case study as research design informed by literary research from the preceding chapters. The chapter is an enquiry into attitudes towards Ruskin, Ruskin Land and nature among the members of the twenty-first century community connected to Ruskin Land. Guild of St. George Companions, WCLT board members and employees, and WCLT volunteers made up three stakeholder groups[4] and their responses to my interview questions produced results enhancing Chapter 3's suggestion of the decreasing importance of Ruskin at Ruskin Land. However, the study also revealed unacknowledged connections to Ruskin's nineteenth century theoretical models, most notably the hierarchical organisational structure at work both within the Guild and at Ruskin Land. Taking the clear format of a social sciences study report as inspiration for the layout of this lengthy chapter, it is divided into sections. I describe the study design, setting, tools employed,

[4] With some overlap between groups.

participants and procedure in *Methodology*. The *Results* section presents the data collected. It is divided into three Case Studies, each devoted to a separate participant group and organised into three segments discussing attitudes to Ruskin, Ruskin Land and nature. These are aided by visual representations of the data in the form of word clouds. I comment on and analyse my data case by case in the *Discussion* section of the chapter to finally discuss my role as a researcher and the limits of the project in *Reflexivity and Limitations of the Study*. The chapter ends with a *Conclusion* in which I propose matters arising from the study that may merit consideration by the WCLT and the Guild of St. George.

Chapter 1: The Roots

> We will try to take some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful. We will have no steam-engines upon it, and no railroads; we will have no untended or unthought-of creatures on it; none wretched, but the sick; none idle but the dead. We will have no liberty upon it; but instant obedience to known law, and appointed persons: no equality upon it; but recognition of every betterness that we can find, and reprobation of every worseness. When we want to go anywhere, we will go there quietly and safely, not at forty miles an hour in the risk of our lives; when we want to carry anything anywhere, we will carry it either on the backs of beasts, or on our own, or in carts, or boats; we will have plenty of flowers and vegetables in our gardens, plenty of corn and grass in our fields,—and few bricks. (27.96)

This short extract from *Letter 5* (May 1871) of John Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1871-1884) can be read as a useful summary of his idealistic land settlement scheme expressed throughout the work. In this enticing paragraph, the Victorian polymath John Ruskin told his readers the foundations on which life in his rural settlements would be based. He, and his followers, would acquire small plots of land in England that would be turned productive and pleasant to live on through good care of the land and animals. In their work and daily lives, settlers would not rely on artificially-powered machines. They will all work for their keep and be bound by obedience to the law and hierarchy. The vision found fertile ground with a dedicated few in Ruskin's lifetime—enough to start three farms and establish an organisation to oversee the scheme. Unusually for Utopian plans, Ruskin's organisation—and more importantly for this thesis, one of his settlements—survive to the present day and this quotation continues to inspire people living and working there. Known today as Ruskin Land, this woodland estate in Bewdley, Worcestershire uses this quotation in promoting and planning Ruskin-inspired projects. Shaved of all but the first

sentence, the extract may even be the only quotation from *Fors Clavigera*—or all of Ruskin—that people at modern-day Ruskin Land come in contact with as it has become a motto for those involved in the work there.

Reading of Ruskin's *Fors* has changed since the nineteenth century, and from the very beginning, the application of his thoughts has differed from the theory. To be able to recount the experiences of Ruskinians on site in Bewdley, and inform analyses of their adherence to Ruskin's ideals, this thesis begins by considering how Ruskin Land was first conceived. This opening chapter thus focuses on Ruskin's ideas of and practical attempts at ideal communities devised and reported on in *Fors Clavigera*. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into two parts. The first part studies *Fors Clavigera* as a means of communicating Ruskin's ideas to readers from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. It looks at the circumstances of the work's creation, the main message within and the method of disseminating it as letters. Much of this I do in an analysis of *Fors Clavigera* as an example of epistolary writing. The second part of this chapter offers a synthesis of Ruskin's plans for England and a brief comparison to similar agrarian Utopian schemes around Ruskin's time. The chapter ends with Ruskin's and his followers' first attempts to put theory from *Fors* into practice through the establishment of the Guild of St. George and acquisition and management of the first plots of land.

Fors Clavigera

Fors Clavigera. Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain is one of the last of John Ruskin's works. A combination of personal journal with letters from readers, press cuttings, documents, financial accounts and prints, it is a text that "steps beyond traditional literary genres" (Maidment 199). Spanning fourteen years (1871-1884) and ninety-six letters, it is over two thousand pages long in the digital version commonly used now by researchers—volumes 27-29 in the Library Edition (1906)—and touches on many of the topics in which Ruskin was interested such as history, art, economy, social justice, and religion. Its main message was the need for, and some guidelines on, a reorganisation of social and economic life in Britain so that people could live satisfying lives based on self-sufficiency and appreciation of the environment.

Seemingly far removed from the art criticism that had brought Ruskin fame, *Fors Clavigera*, in its author's own assessment, expressed how his thinking had developed in his lifetime, decade by decade, from when he was 20 to 70 years old:

> *Modern Painters* taught the claim of all lower nature on the hearts of men; of the rock, and wave, and herb, as a part of their necessary spirit life; in all that I now bid you to do, to dress the earth and keep it, I am fulfilling what I then began. The *Stones of Venice* taught the laws of constructive Art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice, for its beauty, on the happy life of the workman. *Unto this Last* taught the laws of that life itself, and its dependence on the Sun of Justice: the Inaugural Oxford lectures, the necessity that it should be led, and the gracious laws of beauty and labour recognized, by the upper, no less than the lower, classes of England; and lastly *Fors Clavigera* has declared the relation of these to each other, and the only possible conditions of peace and honour, for low and high, rich and poor, together, in the holding of that first Estate, under the only Despot, God . . .. (29.137-8)

What seems particularly important in this quotation, is the Old Testament command to use the land in a way that makes it last—"to dress" and "to keep it." This is key to Ruskin: proper care for the land from which people derive their livelihoods was the highest value ("in the holding of that first Estate") and the only way in which humans could lead harmonious, moral lives (lives of "peace and honour"). I discuss the particulars of this plan in more detail in the second part of this chapter.

Concentrating on only the major achievements of each decade of his life, Ruskin omits from the above list his teaching spell at Working Men's College in London in the 1850s and a short pamphlet he wrote in 1868, *Notes on the General Principles of Employment for the Destitute and Criminal Classes*. Both bear evidence of thinking that Ruskin later developed in *Fors Clavigera*. Teaching at the College provided Ruskin with an opportunity to implement his goal of making a thinking man do work and a working man, think—where Ruskin was the former and his students the latter (Ballantyne 166). Thinking men doing physical work would later be seen in the road-building project by Oxford undergraduates at Hinksey (1873),

and called for in *Fors Clavigera*. Other ideas reused later in *Fors* and first promoted by Ruskin at the College involved an emphasis on "community and fellowship . . . resistance to competition, and personal advancement", along with Ruskin's vision of a perfect society that would be "rural, free of technology, capitalism and competition, happy in its work and loyal to its 'masters'" (Batchelor 137, 139). The 1868 pamphlet also resembles what was later proposed in *Fors Clavigera*, for example reclaiming wasteland for agriculture and using natural energy and manpower instead of artificial machine power. The added benefit of the latter would be making "useless people useful, and [letting] them earn their money instead of begging it" (17.540). The quotation from *Fors* with which this chapter opened—and which has proven so influential to those working at Ruskin Land today—is just one of the many extracts containing ideas similar to those expressed by Ruskin in the decade preceding the publication of *Fors*.

By the end of the 1860s, Ruskin felt that his writings and teachings on art had no positive effect or visible result (O'Gorman, *Late Ruskin* 64). He also claimed he was unable to stand by and witness the degeneration of Britain while knowing the solution to its problems; *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* was where he would tell "Workmen and Labourers" what needed to be done. In his first letter, in January 1871, he declared:

> I have listened to many ingenious persons, who say we are better off now than ever we were before. I do not know how well off we were before; but I know positively that many very deserving persons of my acquaintance have great difficulty in living under these improved circumstances: also, that my desk is full of begging letters, eloquently written either by distressed or dishonest people; and that we cannot be called, as a nation, well off, while so many of us are either living in honest or in villainous beggary. For my own part, I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer. (27.12-3)

Opposed to responding to "begging letters," Ruskin would offer a different solution, one which would require people to work for their keep rather than be kept by means of charity money and would offer a long-term solution to the problems of England. *Fors* was conceived as a monthly means of educating them with epistolary

stories and lessons through which Ruskin would tell his readers what they could do to improve their lives. He also hoped to inspire them to want to do this so that a "properly educated worker would know how to provide for himself in part because he would have plenty of resources at hand, but also because he would understand the importance of providing for himself with just the right amount of useful things" (Albritton and Albritton Jonsson 50).

There was no particular end date planned for *Fors*—although Ruskin did not foresee that it would be as long as it became (Dickinson, *Needlework* n.pag.). In the event, the series stopped in 1878 and then again in 1880 to be finally ended in 1884, in all cases due to Ruskin's failing mental health. There was also no specific plan for the structure of the series or order of its contents. Its title—*Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*—apart from suggesting who the expected readership were, could be seen as a clue to its contents and their (dis)organisation. In the second letter of the series Ruskin explained that "Fors" had the triple meaning of force, fortitude and fortune (27.28), referring to each as the First, Second or Third Fors. The Third Fors appeared the most often as the influence for what Ruskin wrote in particular letters. For example, he explained why he was quoting certain interesting passages from a newspaper, saying: "It chanced by the appointment of the third Fors, to which, you know, I am bound in these letters uncomplainingly to submit" (27.270). Submitting to the Third Fors of fortune or fate allowed for a multitude of interesting topics to be discussed on the pages of *Fors Clavigera*, but may have exasperated readers impatient for Ruskin to reveal his plan—and may still now. Careful and slow reading of *Fors* letter by letter for this thesis revealed it to me to be more unified than it appears and to contain links between letters and series within series. Its argument can be followed, although I am inclined to agree with Kenneth Clark that Ruskin's "inability to stick to the point" can occasionally "reduce his reader to a kind of hysterical despair" (xiii). This need not be negative; however, it may have made *Fors* a trying series to follow by Ruskin's general reader—or his intender reader, the labourer and workman, if the titular addressee was to be taken literally.

As suggested by the title, Ruskin's intended readers seem to be members of the working classes. According to some scholars, this is also evident in the language

Ruskin uses, the occasional direct address to the reader and the message of *Fors*. In ""Blind Mouths': Ruskin and the Reading of the Text," Toni Cerutti calls Ruskin a "sophisticated writer" who adapted his style so that his "scholarly subjects [became] accessible to a heterogeneous audience" (27). Read thus, *Fors* is an example of Ruskin's effort to "[fuse] together the highly refined structure of his thought and the easygoing [sic] language of didactic vulgarisation" (28). With accessible language, the ideas expressed in *Fors* would have also been appealing to "Labourers and Workmen." In his monograph devoted to the early working-class Companions of the Guild of St. George, Frost notes that one should not underestimate "the powerful effect of Ruskin's prose on working-class readers" who would have been receptive to "visions of good air, healthy exercise, and honourable labour" if shut up for long hours in terrible working conditions (*Lost Companions* 70). When addressing his readers, for example, as "Sheffield men", Ruskin seemed to confirm what type of reader he had in mind, but it is debatable whether *Fors* would have reached them due to its high cost (29.698). The average workman may not have been able to afford to buy *Fors Clavigera* regularly. *Fors* cost 7 pence (7d) per issue and the average wage in the 1860s was between 3 shillings 9 pence (3s 9d) and 6s 6d a week for a common labourer (Nelson).[5] He would have normal living expenses to take care of and if weekly rent is estimated at 6d in 1888, then *Fors* would be more than a quarter of a month's worth of rent (Patterson). For comparison, Ruskin's Sheffield readers could have a week's worth of *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for the price of one *Fors Clavigera* letter.[6] Later, when *Fors* went through different editions it may have been more affordable, but by the time these began to be published in 1882, "Ruskin had lost interest in communicating plans" (*Lost Companions* 67).

The high price of *Fors* may have been the main reason that Ruskin did not reach his intended readership thus resulting in, in Brian Maidment's opinion, the publication's failure to start "an effective dialogue between a benign author and

[5] About £1.83 out of a wage of £11.74-£20.35 in 2017 according to The National Archives currency converter (calculations mine).

[6] Based on the price printed on the first pages of the newspapers available in the British Library Newspapers archive.

the working classes" (Maidment 196, qtd. in *Lost Companions* 65). However, according to Dinah Birch who edited the most recent edition of *Fors* (2000), "Workmen and Labourers" did not have to be taken to mean lower-class readers only. In the preface to her edition, Birch writes that "anyone who did useful work, or wanted to do so, was included in [Ruskin's] readership" (xxxiii). The actual readership of *Fors* requires separate study beyond the scope of this thesis, but it should be noted that most of the early settlers at Ruskin Land hailed from the middle-classes. This affirms Jan Marsh's claim that those who most readily responded to the idea of moving back to the country in the Victorian period were "the children of the suburbs . . . the sons and especially the daughters of those who worked in the professions, the finance houses or the upper reaches of the civil service, but who had no pressing needs for employment themselves" (5-6).[7]

Scarce evidence exists of how *Fors* was read in the nineteenth century, regardless of what class its readers belonged to, although some working-class Guild Companions' references to this can be found in Frost's 2014 book which distilled archival resources to shed light on this. I can hazard a guess that the Bewdley settlers from Liverpool may have read *Fors* together during meetings of their Liverpool Ruskin Society, but none left evidence of how exactly they read it—how they interpreted it, on the other hand, can be seen in Chapter 2 where I trace specific examples. Readers in the twenty-first century have access to *Fors* through two edited and annotated formats: in full as volumes 27 to 29 in the Library Edition (1906 and available online through The Ruskin) and in a volume edited by Dinah Birch (2000). Birch abridged *Fors*, choosing a selection "of the most challenging writing" to allow the reader to "trace the development of Ruskin's thinking as the series develops" while trying "to give a sense of Ruskin's tone and subject" (xlviii). In their edition, Cook and Wedderburn included *Fors* in its entirety, believing it needed to be read as a whole to be understood (27.xxx). What makes each of these similar—and different from the initial format—is that they are *books* in one or more volumes, rather than individual letters arriving, as they would originally, by post.

[7] It may be argued that the middle-classes are still the demographic most populous at Ruskin Land. The study in Chapter 4 of this thesis considers class affiliation as a possible avenue of further research at Ruskin Land.

Read as either a book of letters (several in one sitting) or individual letters (one per sitting) *Fors Clavigera*'s epistolary format merits a discussion. Within the context of this thesis, it serves as a methodological underpinning of later chapters as letters recur as a key resource throughout.

Epistolarity

". . . *Fors is a letter*, and written as a letter should be written, frankly, and as the mood, or topic, chances . . ." (29.197). So wrote Ruskin, a prolific letter writer in his private life, of *Fors Clavigera*, a public yet personal composite-letter. Published in monthly instalments each typically written not long ahead of publication, *Fors* was very up-to-date with current events and allowed Ruskin to respond almost immediately to what had caught his attention. These could be newspaper articles and letters from readers, which, together with prints, drawings, and, after the establishment of the St. George's Fund, financial accounts, all made their way onto the pages of *Fors*. This variety of material included in *Fors* prompted Ruskin's editors Cook and Wedderburn to liken it to "a diary and a commonplace book" (27.xxx); today it could be called a nineteenth century equivalent of a blog (Ballantyne 192). Because *Fors Clavigera* contains all of these elements and has been available to be read in book form of varying length since its first pocket editions, it sits somewhere between standard letters and epistolary novels, as well as containing elements of other genres (for example, autobiography). Conforming to and inverting expectations of both types of writing, particularly linearity, *Fors* exhibits what Mark Frost sees as Ruskin's "ecological" style of writing:

> Rather than being an indicator of inconsistency or a lack of intellectual quality, Ruskin's inability to maintain fixed positions on subjects, and the incoherence of much of his work in terms of long-term logical development and structure, was indicative of its ecological organisation. (*The Law of Help* 6-7)

"Ecological organisation" enhances the environmental and communitarian message of *Fors* while preventing an easy categorisation into the genre of letters or epistolary novels. Working with Cook and Wedderburn's Library Edition of *Fors* I offer a comparison of *Fors* to both types of writing. My analysis is aided by the

publications by Janet Gurkin Altman's *Epistolarity. Approaches to a Form* (1982) and edited by David Barton, and Nigel Hall's *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (1999). Altman focuses on epistolary fiction and its structures and patterns, as well as elements which the genre borrows from letters and which influence the writing and reading of both; Barton and Hall offer a collection of essays on aspects of letter writing that highlight their social significance. Both Altman's and Barton and Hall's work outline characteristics of epistolary writing such as the act and stages of writing and reading letters, their typical components and contents, and the relationship between the writers and readers. What started as a research exercise to compile their individual catalogues into one, is now included in this chapter as Table 1 to offer an at-a-glance comparison between *Fors Clavigera* and other letter writing. The table and its sections are my distillation and merging of Altman's and Barton and Hall's work. Following the pattern of the table, this section offers brief examples of these characteristics, each set out beneath a subheading.

Table 1.

Fors Clavigera vs. Letters and Epistolary Novels—Similarities and Differences (Altman, Barton and Hall, Dominika Wielgopolan).

Letters and epistolary novels	*Fors Clavigera*
Act of writing	
Solitary activity	Yes
Special place	Yes
Typical components:	
date	Yes
salutation	Partial
securing of good will	Yes
narrative	Yes
petition	Yes
conclusion (and closure)	Partial
Writer-Reader relationship	
Presence in the text:	
of writer	Yes
of reader	Yes
Specific reader in mind	Yes
Shared knowledge	Partial
Special language	Yes
Confidentiality	Partial
Unburdening	Partial
Stylistics	
Time & space	Yes
Reflexivity	Yes
Elements of other genres	Yes
Unity & continuity	Partial
Unfolding of the story	Partial
Method of delivery	
Post	Partial
Appearance in other texts	Partial

Act of writing

Letter writing tends to be "portrayed in paintings and photographs as a solitary activity; a person sits down in a particular place in familiar surroundings and takes time over the activity" (Barton and Hall 8). Familiar surroundings can mean a specific space with necessary artefacts, such as a study with a bureau, particular type of paper and pens. In Ruskin's case, it is possible to visualise some elements of that image: his study at Brantwood is mentioned on the pages of *Fors*, depicted in paintings, and is now a space visitors can see in person as his Lakeland home is now a museum. Ruskin tells us something of his writing routine too, particularly the time of day he liked to write—he usually started quite early in the morning, which we know from letters or parts of letters dated, for example, "26th December, 1872, 8, Morning" or by information such as "[this letter] was prepared for press on the morning of the 25th of last month . . . before the papers of that day had reached me" (27.466, 6). We can also imagine what made the space comfortable and what he liked looking at. *Letter 25* written from Oxford during his professorship offers some details on that:

> The first quiet and pure light that has risen this many a day, was increasing through the tall stems of the trees of our garden . . . [and] I was breathing out of the window, thrown up as high as I could (for my servant had made me an enormous fire, as servants always do on hot mornings), and looking at the bright sickle of a moon, fading as she rose . . .. (27.466-67)

Written at the end of December, the morning would have not been really "hot" suggesting that Ruskin preferred cooler spaces to write in, liked to begin early (fading moon) and work by the window. In this case offering fresh air, writing by the window was also probably dictated by practical reasons of looking for best light. It also offered the possibility to monitor the changes in skies. Ruskin seems to have regularly worked in similar settings also while travelling abroad. One such example is in a letter sent from Venice:

> I have set my writing-table close to the pillars of the great window of the Ca' Ferro . . . Between the shafts of the pillars, the morning sky is seen pure and pale . . . [but] vast thunderclouds heap themselves above the horizon, catching the light of dawn upon them . . .. (28.756)

The scene is similar to the one from Oxford, with Ruskin looking at a "pure"—bright—morning sky through nature- or man-made columns. The similarity of the two scenes fulfils the sense of seeking similar spaces to write in as noted by Barton and Hall.

In the Library Edition of *Fors*, the date of writing, together with the location, are given at the top of the letters, for example "VERONA, 18*th June*, 1872", "BRANTWOOD, 19*th September*, 1872" (27.320, 371). These supposedly were not printed on the letters when they were first published; Cook and Wedderburn state they included them for the first time in the Library Edition "to facilitate such careful reading of *the book as a whole*" (27.xxx, emphasis added). The editors then intended for *Fors* to be read like a book, although of an unspecified genre. My decision was to apply approaches to epistolary novels as a means of exploring its epistolary format.

One expects a salutation to open a letter, and Ruskin's "salutation" to his readers occurred up until *Letter 24* (December 1872): Ruskin began the letters with "My Friends" or just "Friends" (27.45, 11). He abandoned this at the end of the second year of publishing *Fors*, claiming to be in a bad mood with the world and with his readers who, he believed, had not been responding to his message:

> I shall not call you so any more, after this Christmas; first, because things have chanced to me, of late, which have made me too sulky to be friends with anybody; secondly, because in the two years during which I have been writing these letters, not one of you has sent me a friendly word of answer; . . . Nor shall I sign my name . . . So that the letters will begin henceforward without address; and close without signature. You will probably know whom they come from, and I don't in the least care whom they go to. (27.417)

True to his word, after that letter Ruskin stopped signing *Fors* letters abandoning his usual formula, or its variation, of "your faithful friend, JOHN RUSKIN" (for example 27.26).

The "salutation" is not followed by a typical "securing of good will" such as asking how the readers are (Barton and Hall 6). Ruskin is not expecting a reply, certainly not from every single one of his readers. However, it may be argued that he secures the readers' good will through his chatty tone and offering anecdotes

from his life. Take, for example, the description of a morning in Oxford, above, which flows into an account of a misadventure involving "two hundred and sixty-six wax matches" that had spilled from his "lucifer-match box" and needed picking up one by one, wasting his precious working time (27.467). Rachel Dickinson sees such devices as "designed actively to engage with the reader" (*Ruskinian Moral Authority* 59). In this case, the account may make the readers imagine the activity or even see their own experiences reflected in it and sympathise with Ruskin.

The "petition" at the end of the letters is occasionally a request to study their contents and try to understand what Ruskin had been trying to communicate. The "conclusion" often immediately follows "petition" and tends to be about what Ruskin intends to talk about in the following letters. The end of *Letter 1* sets the pattern: "[in the future] I will tell you somewhat also of the real nature of interest; but if you will only get, for the present, a quite clear idea of 'the Position of William,' it is all I want of you" (xxvii.26). It lays a path of expectation for readers and thereby offers a promise to continue the epistolary relationship.

It is important to consider the "closure" of *Fors* letters. Altman writes that "[t]he dynamics of letter narrative involves a movement between two poles: the potential finality of the letter's sign-off and the open-endedness of the letter seen as a segment within a chain of dialogue" (187). Two elements of this quotation require addressing. Ruskin began *Fors Clavigera* without a clear end date for it, so the readers did not know in advance when the series would finish. However, the "potential finality" may have been noticeable when Ruskin talked about feeling overworked or wondered whether he will live long enough to finish his work. For example, in the letter of October 1877, four months before his breakdown, Ruskin wrote that he could not "continue to ride so many horses at once, or keep so many balls in the air," and continued, speaking of himself in the third person, that "all that he thinks it needful, in this *Fors*, to say, is that, whatever he may cease hope of doing, he will not fail from St. George's work, as long as he has strength for any work at all" (29.248). Ruskin recognised that he was struggling and his unusual use of third person when referring to himself may also be a marker of mental health issues—some recent findings show that such pronouns may help regulate emotions by creating "psychological distance needed to facilitate self control [sic]" (Moser et

al., Abstract). In March 1878 the series ended abruptly and without promising continuation. It is not possible to talk of "closure" here as Ruskin did not write of this ending in his letter; a notice was included by Ruskin's publisher with the March issue of *Fors* announcing that "Professor Ruskin, who is at present lying seriously ill—from prostration, caused by overwork—will not, until further notice, be able to issue 'Fors,' his medical advisers having ordered absolute rest for some time" (29.xxx). In the second part of the above quotation from Altman, she talks about letter exchange as a dialogue—when we read a letter in an epistolary novel, even if no answer to it is provided, we can usually gather from a subsequent letter that some answer had been received as there might be more or less direct references to it. It is not that straightforward in *Fors Clavigera*—Ruskin's addressee is a group and not an individual and therefore he does not expect each of his readers to send a response. However, as the publication of *Fors* progressed, more and more readers began writing responses. If Ruskin found a letter particularly interesting or useful, he would comment on it in the main body of *Fors* letters or include it in the *Notes and Correspondence* section. It could be argued then that *Fors Clavigera* is, quoted earlier, Altman's "chain of dialogue" albeit a non-standard one, also because reader letters were always mentioned with a time lag—more on which in the Stylistics section below.

Writer-Reader relationship

Ruskin as the letter-writer is very much present in every issue of *Fors Clavigera*. There is no attempt on his part to pretend that *Fors* is anything else but an expression of his views on every subject he discusses, a means of communicating his plan for the re-colonisation of England and, eventually, a "mouthpiece" of his Guild of St. George (27.xxxiii, xliv). Altman writes that there is always a "you" to the "I" in every letter (117). Ruskin freely uses both pronouns as the letters are where he talks to his readers. For example, in his very first *Fors* Ruskin writes:

> . . . I must clear myself from all sense of responsibility for the material distress around me, by explaining to you, once for all, in the shortest English I can, what I know of its causes; by pointing out to you some of the methods by which it might be relieved; and by setting aside regularly some small

> percentage of my income, to assist, as one of yourselves, in what one and all we shall have to do; each of us laying by something, according to our means, for the common service . . .. (27.13-14)

Here, Ruskin uses the pronouns "I" and "you" to forge the connection and show the relationship between himself and his reader while simultaneously explaining why the reader is reading the letter at all. He is writing because he notices the poor state of England and is not prepared to ignore it any longer, particularly because he knows the problem's solution. Using "I" and "you," he established a teacher-student relationship first to then quickly switch to "we" and "you" perhaps in an effort to use psychology to create a feeling of shared responsibility and thus entice readers to contribute to the scheme.

I agree with Birch that Ruskin's intended reader was not just the working classes but anyone who wanted to do good work, and so I put "yes" next to "specific reader in mind" in my table—despite Ruskin not writing to an addressee personally known to him. Out of the whole body of his readers, small groups are occasionally identified by Ruskin when he addresses people from particular locations or of particular occupations. For example, he writes to the Sheffield workers. He also specifically addresses women, for example: "Do you know now, any of you, ladies mine, what Giotto's lilies mean between the roses?" (27.165).

A group addressee much diminishes the sense of intimacy present in letters shared between a writer and only one reader. There could be no real sense of intimacy in public letters such as *Fors*, although Ruskin could sometimes be very frank about his emotional or mental states like when he writes in December 1874: ". . . I am so alone now in my thoughts and ways, that if I am not mad, I should soon become so, from mere solitude, but for my *work*" (28.206). However, there is no major "unburdening" on the part of Ruskin, as we would expect in an epistolary novel, no revealing of deep secrets. In both a novel and *Fors* the readers are more of a "passive confidant" than an active one—they "fulfil [their] minimal, passive, twofold function: . . . listen to confessions [and] stories" (Altman 50). It could be argued that Ruskin's confidants are not entirely passive, as he does receive letters from them in response to *Fors*. Although he may mention or answer these in the *Notes and Correspondence* section of *Fors*, they do not influence his overall scheme

for the series. It is not a letter exchange where the response, implied or included, shapes the next letter like in an epistolary novel. Even so, in *Fors* there is a sense of shared knowledge of Ruskin's opinions and contents of previous letters and he occasionally refers to what he'd already written saying things like "as I have told you before" (29.70).

As this is not private correspondence, there are no intimate terms of endearment or idiolect—like in Ruskin's private correspondence, for example in the letters to his cousin, Joan Severn.[8] The language of *Fors's* letters is nonetheless "special" in that it is, as Cerutti notes, different, by being simpler, to Ruskin's usual style (27). This is what Altman calls "addressee-consciousness" and *Fors* conforms to her assertion that the addressee—the reader—is "a determinant of the letter's message. Indeed, at the very inception of the letter, he plays an instrumental generative role" and further, that "addressee-consciousness informs the act of writing itself" (88, 111). Either determining beforehand what he was going to write about in a particular issue of *Fors*, or letting himself be guided by the Third Fors, Ruskin nonetheless had his (more or less defined) reader in mind. Keeping the reader in mind influenced the style of his prose, the appropriateness of topic and the particular lesson he wanted to impart with it.

Stylistics

Commenting on temporality in letters, Altman observes that "letter writers are bound in a present preoccupied with the future" (124). This is present in *Fors*, which was being written with the main purpose of changing the present unhappy state of England and its people and ensure their future wellbeing. In his very first letter, Ruskin complained that he could not ". . . do anything . . . that I like, and the very light of the morning sky, . . . has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of . . ." and was determined to explain how things could be changed for the better (27.13). Three years on, he declared that *Fors*

[8] See edited by Rachel Dickinson *John Ruskin's Correspondence with Joan Severn: Sense and Nonsense Letters* (2008).

letters were written to be read and only really understood by the labourers of future England:

> . . . [a] day will come when we shall have men resolute to do good work, and capable of reading and thinking while they rest; . . . and then they will find my letters useful, and read them. And to the few readers whom these letters now find, they will become more useful as they go on. (27.669)

This was written when Ruskin was reflecting on what he had achieved. He was disappointed in the slow uptake of his ideas as estimated by the disappointing amount of contributions received, but was trying to find comfort in the thought that someday, his teachings would be understood and taken to heart.

David Barton and Nigel Hall add a spatial element to the temporal with their assertion that "time and space are important in that spatial distance is often the main reason for the letter's existence and there is a time lag between the writing and the reading. Two worlds are invoked: the here and now of the writer and the here and now of the reader" (6). Like any letter, *Fors* was no exception to the time lag, irrespective of whether it was read in the month of its publication or later as a collection. Likened before to a blog, *Fors* did not have a blog's instant availability to readers—printing and delivery to subscribers necessarily took some time. The time lag increased if Ruskin chose to write his letters several weeks or months in advance, as occurred when the January-March 1878 issues he actually wrote in Winter 1887. This would make for an interesting time paradox of writing in advance of particular anticipated events to end up being behind.

To her discussion of space in letters, Altman adds that they could either emphasise the distance between people or make the reader and writer feel closer to each other. Evidence from letters and articles chosen by Ruskin to exhibit in *Fors*—so perhaps biased—suggests that some readers found the latter to be true. As already mentioned, Ruskin chose the letter format deliberately to make his message personal and appealing. The *Notes and Correspondence* sections of *Fors*, as well as footnotes added later by Ruskin's editors, seem to show it worked. For example, in *Letter 89* (September 1880) Cook and Wedderburn include an extract from a working-class paper reassuring Ruskin he is appreciated: ". . . [we] look upon him in the light which he would value most, that of a man who loves truth for its

own sake, and is a sincere lover of his fellow-men, and who desires in his heart their elevation to a higher plane" (29.398-99 footnote 3).

Other elements under the *Stylistics* heading in Table 1—reflexivity and elements of other genres—also occur in *Fors*. In accordance with Barton and Hall's characterisation of reflexivity every *Fors* letter is self-reflective in that "reference is often made within the letter to the existence of the letter itself" (6-7). Ruskin made various frequent references to the letters he was writing, using phrases such as "this letter" or "next month": for example, "I meant to tell you in this letter", "But we will talk further of this next month" (27.468, 112). *Fors* letters also contain elements of genres such as poetry and narrative as well as other forms of writing—news and commentaries, newspaper clippings, other letters, reports, bank statements and accounts, recipes—and even non-textual elements such as drawings and engravings. All included in the Library edition of *Fors,* they make it a text of substantial proportions. Coupled with the variety of topics covered within, this can make *Fors* challenging to follow. Nevertheless, there is unity and continuity, both in each letter and in the collection as a whole. Altman writes that "within the epistolary work the letter has both a dependent and an independent status. . .. Each individual letter enters into the composition of the whole without losing its identity as a separate entity with recognizable borders" (169). Published first in monthly instalments, *Fors* letters were individual pieces in one big series. Published together in the Library Edition, they retain that. Cook and Wedderburn's addition of letter numbers and dates to each instalment both enhances their separateness and reinforces their unfolding unity within the collection. I use these terms with intent, as unity and continuity are linked to the "unfolding of the story" (Altman 172), although in *Fors* this is less straightforward than in an epistolary novel which would have been written by the author to follow a clear plot. Responding to the Third Fors (fortune or chance, as opposed to the third letter) and with his non-linear writing style (discussed earlier in this chapter), Ruskin did not seem to be in a rush to explain his plans, be explicit and organised, or give specific instructions to his readers. Read as a whole, a unifying general theme of reorganising life in England emerges from *Fors*, but the work is more of a mosaic than a clear image of Ruskin's aims, more vignettes than a story.

Method of delivery

Method of delivery is where the *Fors Clavigera* letters differ significantly from standard letters, but resemble letters in an epistolary novel. Typically, letters are sent by post and this requires an address for the intended recipient and an envelope on which to include the address. Epistolary novels rarely include these and *Fors Clavigera* in book form conforms to the epistolary novel model by also only giving the contents of Ruskin's letters and not the accompanying ephemera of envelopes or tissue paper in which these would have been wrapped when sent out monthly ("Bibliographical Note" to Library Edition).

What (the original version of) *Fors* shares with standard letters, is the delivery by post to individual readers' home addresses. However, the transactional element involved—*Fors* letters had to be paid for by the addressee rather than the sender buying a stamp—sets it apart from standard letters, as does the printed format in place of a traditional handwritten message. These could have warped the sense of intimacy potentially created by individual delivery. Seeing one's name and address on the package, and Ruskin's use of the pronoun "you" were otherwise clever methods of enhancing the already discussed way of engaging with the reader, and also an attempt at making *Fors Clavigera* available only to those who really wanted to read it by excluding the potential randomness of selection in bookshops.

Barton and Hall point out that letters do not have to rely only on the postal service to reach a reader; they may also "appear in other texts" such as printed media which often have letter columns (8). *Fors Clavigera* was not meant for, and did not appear in, letter columns in the press. Yet it had a presence there: Cook and Wedderburn claim that "it was much ridiculed in the public press, but it was not ignored. Ruskin's name probably figured more frequently in the newspapers during the continuance of *Fors* than at any previous period. If the book called forth derision in some quarters, it attracted to Ruskin devout disciples from others" (27.lxxxvi). Disciples—readers—who may have been reached through Barton and Hall's "other texts". Such a way of gaining readership may still be applicable to *Fors*. With a large body of Ruskin scholarship accumulated over the century since the

writer's death, the modern reader may be more likely to first read extracts from *Fors* quoted in the work of others before reaching for *Fors Clavigera* the original.

Sharing similarities with both standard letters and works such as epistolary novels, the format in which *Fors Clavigera* is read may affect its reception and interpretation by readers. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the effect of *Fors* on masses. It is enough that a small group of followers found it a catalyst for a change in lifestyle and inspiration to settle in Bewdley, in the Wyre. This next section will look at the vision that Ruskin offered such readers in *Fors*.

Rural Vision for England

The details of Ruskin's vision for England are fragmented and spread across many issues of *Fors Clavigera*. In the opening letter of the series, he criticised the unhappiness of England and claimed that he would be unable fully to devote himself to teaching at Oxford until he began the process of wider change. He wrote:

> . . . I must clear myself from all sense of responsibility for the material distress around me, by explaining to you, once for all, in the shortest English I can, what I know of its causes; by pointing out to you some of the methods by which it might be relieved; and by setting aside regularly some small percentage of my income, to assist, as one of yourselves, in what one and all we shall have to do; each of us laying by something, according to our means, for the common service . . . (27.13-14)

The public declaration to give money to his cause signalled not just good intentions on Ruskin's part, but also that the scheme he was about to reveal was to be practical. The promise to "point out the methods" of change may have suggested to his first readers that they could expect unambiguous instructions. However, Ruskin's "shortest English" soon proved to be longer that his readers expected, mainly due to the influence of the Third Fors, fate. Ruskin himself did not anticipate the length of *Fors*. Since that first letter, four more months passed before Ruskin offered a concise statement on what he expected to happen with his donation. In May 1871, he promised to give a tenth of what he had and requested readers to help in a similar way. He asked in *Fors*:

> Who else will help, with little or much? the object of such fund being, to begin, and gradually—no matter how slowly—to increase, the buying and securing of land in England, which shall not be built upon, but cultivated by Englishmen, with their own hands, and such help of force as they can find in wind and wave. (27.95)

Here, readers learned that Ruskin wanted to collect money to acquire arable land that would be worked using natural sources of power: human muscle, wind and water. The emphasis on using natural power came from Ruskin's dislike of "idleness" bemoaned earlier in the letter and concern over the state of the environment—both of which he saw as being directly related to industrialisation (27.87). Ruskin argued that machinery employed to do humans' work for them did not give them better lives but stripped them of satisfaction and pride in their work., He claimed that he had "examples, millions of them [Continental farmers working without machinery], of happy people, made happy by their own industry. Farm after farm . . . in Bavaria, Switzerland, the Tyrol, . . . where men and women are perfectly happy and good, without any iron servants." He challenged his titular audience, the "Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain" to "show me, . . . some English family, with its fiery familiar, happier than these" (27.88). Ruskin did not hate all machinery and was able to appreciate its uses, especially when helping to do work beyond human means (28.654). However, he was worried that humans had started to rely on machines too much and were unnecessarily overusing them (Davis 170). Issues of *Fors* contain his worries that extensive use of machinery led to dependence and loss of such basic and vital skills as the ability to grow food, construct simple furniture or clothe oneself (for example 27.24, 89). He was also concerned that the quickness and ease with which these could be made by machines, and the resulting availability, also resulted in accumulation of unnecessary—or not essential—things (for example 27.19, 28.134). A view which was endorsed by Liverpool settlers to Bewdley who left their lives for a sparser lifestyle in the countryside.

Prophetically critical of omnipresent pollution, Ruskin identified the only material things necessary for humans to survive as "Pure Air, Water, and Earth," accompanied by immaterial necessities as articulated by Wordsworth "Admiration,

Hope, and Love" (27.90).[9] In *Letter 5*. Ruskin explains why humans need the six. My focus here is on the three natural elements because they capture much of what was intended when Ruskin Land was first established and what the aims continue to be as it offers a model for Ruskin-inspired sustainability. Clean air, pure water and clean and fertile soil are recognised by twenty-first century environmental researchers as essential for sustaining life on Earth. Even a cursory online search brings up results of numerous academic papers and journal articles devoted to the topic and it is uncanny that Ruskin should identify the trio as essential to life more than a hundred years before this became commonly accepted truth. Writing on Ruskin's essay *The Storm-Cloud* (1880) which linked industrialisation with climate change—a fact unrecognised in Ruskin's time—Ballantyne considers Ruskin's environmental "foresight . . . extraordinary and Cassandra-like" (203). Taking his lead from the Bible (KJV, Gen. 1.28), Ruskin saw clean air, water and soil as given to humans by the divine and completely at their mercy: "Heaven gives you the main elements of these. You can destroy them at your pleasure, or increase, almost without limit, the available quantities of them" (27.91). God-given to humans for use and care, they had control over the amount and quality of air, water and soil, and Ruskin perceived that humans were poisoning all three through extensive industrial production and accompanying creation of industrial and human waste, especially terrible in cities, ". . . the horrible nests, . . . little more than laboratories for the distillation into heaven of venomous smokes and smells . . ." (27.91). To cleanse the air, Ruskin championed what those concerned about the planet now recognise as necessary: a ban on poisonous gas emissions and the positive action of effective recycling and tree-planting. Ruskin also understood that properly looked after trees were important for the retention of water and general good condition of soils, and that reckless deforestation brought about droughts—something early civilizations were aware of, but later societies had forgotten (Crane 52, 266). Contrasting the attractive imagery of cleanliness with off-putting depiction of pollution, Ruskin aimed to convince his readers that they could "have the rivers of England as pure as the crystal of the rock; beautiful in falls, in lakes, in living pools;

[9] For Wordsworth's influence on Ruskin, see Jonathan Bate's *Romantic ecology: Wordsworth and the environmental tradition* (1991).

so full of fish . . .", or they could ". . . turn every river of England into a common sewer . . ." (27.92). I return to the idea of Ruskinian sustainability and the importance of having "pure Air, Water, and Earth" in Chapters 3 and 4 in which I also explore this idea of trusteeship, or stewardship, of the Earth and use the Ruskinian trio to show people's current attitudes to Ruskin Land.

Having promised to begin the fund with his own donation, Ruskin gave the first £1000 to his cause in August 1871, eight months into the publication of *Fors*. This new "St. George's Fund" would be used, he reminded his readers, "in dressing the earth and keeping it,—in feeding human lips,—in clothing human bodies,—in kindling human souls" (27.142). In other words, the money would go towards the purchase of land and putting it under cultivation. Perhaps uncharacteristically pragmatically, Ruskin even envisaged conducting what could be now called a version of a biodiversity survey prior to any planting: "we will ascertain the absolute best that can be made of every acre. We will first examine what flowers and herbs it naturally bears; every wholesome flower that it will grow shall be sown in its wild places, and every kind of fruit-tree that can prosper . . ." (27.143). With slightly different aims than those of modern surveys of that kind, including the one done recently at Ruskin Land (2017)—increasing the diversity of good plant and animal species on the land surveyed—Ruskin's was to be aimed at making the most of the available soils by correct matching of crops to soil potential. Once this was done, the land would be populated with hard-working and obedient labourers preferably in family units. Any children would be given practical education in agriculture and taught basic skills such as cooking and clothes making. They would also be expected to refine their minds through the study of languages, history and music. An important part of their education would also be kindness to animals and politeness to humans, or, in Ruskin's words, "gentleness to all brute creatures [and] finished courtesy to each other" (27.143). Significantly, from the point of view of what is being done at modern-day Ruskin Land, children on Ruskin's settlements were also to learn "the natural history of the place they live in" (27.143).

When he envisaged this in 1871, Ruskin hoped this could begin very quickly, but it took him and his lawyers seven years to establish and constitute a body that would be legally able to manage the Fund and lands acquired with its help in a way

that satisfied Ruskin's demand of not-for-profit. Before the Company of St. George was an official body, all Ruskin could do was call for and collect subscriptions, unofficially accept gifts of land,[10] and communicate to the readers some more details of his plans without actually providing a "dogma" for people to follow without thinking (Hewison, "Afterword" 227). At the beginning of the fourth year of writing *Fors* Ruskin offered the most extensive, to that point, account of what St. George's land would be. Repeating his underlying belief that "the substantial wealth of man consists in the earth he cultivates, with its pleasant or serviceable animals and plants, and in the rightly produced work of his own hands," Ruskin wrote in *Letter 37*:

> I mean to buy . . . the first pieces of ground offered to me at fair price . . . to put them as rapidly as possible into order, and to settle upon them as many families as they can support, of young and healthy persons, on the condition that they do the best they can for their livelihood with their own hands, and submit themselves and their children to the rules written for them. (28.18-19)

This repeats Ruskin's intentions, expressed first in 1871, of purchasing land that would be worked to support families of settlers willing to live in hierarchy and submission, and work for their keep without the use of machinery. Having given this summary, Ruskin devoted the rest of *Letter 37* to elaborations on the type of tenant preferred, organisation of life on the estates, simultaneous achievement of simplicity and refinement of life and the type of land that might be bought. Living with a conviction he urgently wanted to prove—that with skilful management, any land could produce crops—Ruskin put quantity over quality. He believed that the worse the land, the more of it he would be able to buy and the greater the victory when anticipated success would be achieved. Ruskin's logic is not without its faults and, in Graham A. MacDonald's opinion, overestimates the potential of English weather conditions for farming. The lived experience at Ruskin Land exposes Ruskin's faulty reasoning. Poor and waterlogged soil there has meant that no

[10] Taken on by his friends as trustees and only later transferred to the Guild.

tenant has been able to make a living off the smallholdings[11] and all have had to rely on an additional source of income, often in the local factories.

Despite giving details of his plan laconically and infrequently, Ruskin nonetheless managed to attract some subscribers to the scheme. Drawing up accounts in December 1874, he reported that he had accumulated £7000 bank stock with close to £1000 of interest. These, however, were all his donations and he remained the Fund's main contributor until the end of his life. Apart from himself, at the end of 1874, the Fund had twenty-four other subscribers, seven of whom were annual (28.223). Ruskin's periodic reviews of subscriptions in subsequent issues of *Fors* show that there was a steady, if very slow, trickle of contributions from a small and very slowly increasing body of followers. In 1875, hopeful that his "Company of St. George" might be established soon, and conscious of not having given his readers any details on his plans for a while, Ruskin busied himself with preparing the organisation's future constitution. Presented to readers as the *Memorandum and Statues of the Company of St. George* in *Letter 55*, this was a draft legal document and so offered a succinct statement of purpose and descriptions of the Company and roles within it. Not included in the main body of that issue of *Fors*, but as an appendix in the "Notes and Correspondence," the *Memorandum* is a concise source of information on the envisaged treatment of land, management of possessions including use of income from rents, and Company membership and leadership. Almost immediately at the beginning, the document states the objective of "determining and instituting in practice the wholesome laws of agricultural life and economy and of instructing the agricultural labourer in the science art and literature of good husbandry" (28.376). This is closely followed by the secondary aim of procuring land. Despite having said previously in *Fors* that all Company land would be cultivated, the *Memorandum* allowed for it to be "left uncultivated or turned into waste or common land" if it was decided to be more "useful" (28.376). It may be that Ruskin was being pragmatic, but it is more likely to reflect an awareness of the unsuitability of certain lands for farming. MacDonald

[11] Only the Harleys (1886-1932) seem to have managed to live off their land, but, as it was not part of the estate owned by the Guild, I did not include them in the above evaluation. Chapter 2 tells the stories of all Bewdley Ruskinians.

points out that Ruskin wrote in *Munera Pulveris* (1871) about areas such as mountains and moorlands as being vital for the environment in their natural state and in such they should forever remain (137).

Under cultivation or not, day-to-day management of the estates would be done by land agents, tenants and labourers, all branded with the medieval word "Retainers" which implies hierarchy and obedience. "Retainers" would be paid employees and not Companions (28.377). Companions too could work the estates; as Ruskin revealed in *Letter 63*, several months after the publication of the *Memorandum*, there would be three types of Companions, grouped according to their means, abilities and dedication:

1. Companions Servant, the least numerous, people of independent means who would devote their energy primarily to the work of the Company;
2. Companions Militant, "occupied . . . in manual labour on the ground, or in any work which the Master may order, for the fulfilment of the Society's functions" who would be paid for this work;
3. Companions Consular, the most numerous group, people who would continue in their "Trades, but giving the tenth of their income to the Company and in all points, involving its principles, obeying the orders of the Master" (28.539-40).

Such divisions in tasks or levels of involvement seemed practical and reflective of Ruskin's conviction that hierarchies were inevitable and necessary in every community and organisation and "rank . . . a natural social phenomenon—there would always be masters and followers . . ."—writes Judith Stoddart in her essay on nation and class in Ruskin (137). Jarring to a liberal mind-set today, hierarchical organisation was not necessarily problematic and Stoddart asserts that Guild Companions would understand the need for it and be conscious of all being part of one organism, or "that their fates were mutually constrained within a community" (138). Beautiful in theory, those divisions did not work well in practice and may have hindered the Guild's early projects. Mark Frost found "the guiding principle of hierarchy and subordination . . . depressingly active" and a barrier for the real doers of the Guild to rise in the ranks in recognition of their input. He writes of this in *Lost Companions*:

> . . . there were few Companion Servants and an overwhelming proportion of largely inactive Consular Companions. Although small in number, the Companions Militant were more significant than anyone has imagined . . .. Rather than being the second order of Companions, they remained firmly at the bottom of the pile . . . (4-5).

This had a direct effect on William Graham working in Bewdley in the 1870s (see Chapter 2) and remnants of a hierarchical structure are still visible in the Guild and at Ruskin Land today—as I demonstrate in Chapter 4.

Utopias

The intellectual climate of the nineteenth century, infused with worries about social conditions in dramatically overpopulated cities and increasing pollution levels, saw back-to-the-land movements as the best remedy to those evils. Jan Marsh writes that, to many, the only solution seemed to be for "the city [to] go, industry [to] be dismantled, the people . . . resettled in villages and the economy return[ed] to craft workshops and guilds" (3-4). The views expressed by Ruskin in *Fors Clavigera*, his practical attempts at communities, and his Guild of St. George are reflective of the Victorian sentiment described by Marsh. Ruskin's rural idyll was not the only such project at that time and, although unique in many respects, it bore some resemblance to others, for example Moravians or Chartists. Promoting his scheme as original and the only one that would work, an attitude resonant of all Utopians, Ruskin admitted to being inspired by the man to whom this word is attributed: Thomas More. Defined by the Oxford Lexico as "an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect" ("Utopia"), "Utopia" came from Thomas More's proto-novel *A Fruiteful and pleasant worke of the beste State of a public weale, and of the new yle, called Utopia* (1516, English translation 1551). Not writing or living in a vacuum, Ruskin was undoubtedly aware of competing idealistic land schemes, even if he did not discuss them in *Fors Clavigera*. In this section of the chapter I look at Ruskin's Utopianism and its resemblance to More, Plato, and others.

Ruskin was quick to acknowledge More's influence. In *Letter 7* (July 1871), he quoted extensively from *Utopia* to explain the true meaning of the word, and,

through that, why he saw himself as a "Communist of the old school" (27.116).[12] Ruskin's understanding of communism came from More's Communes. These were communities in which citizens of Utopia lived and worked together. Ruskin highlighted those ideas of More he thought excellent, for example that all people of Utopia were required to work, and because everyone did it diligently, only six hours of labour a day were required and the rest could be spent enjoying other activities, usually reading. If one did not work, one did not eat. This idea appealed to Ruskin who despaired that a large portion of English society, for example the clergy and the upper classes, exploited the work of others while doing none themselves. Other ideas from More that appear in *Fors* include a National Store of money and treasures of culture; green belts of farmland and nature around cities; common access to parkland filled with wildlife to be admired not hunted; and farming as the main occupation. Although city-centred, Utopia valued farming to such an extent that all its citizens learned the skill from an early age, alongside being taught a trade.

Writing when the Ancients had been rediscovered, More took some inspiration from Plato (Manuel and Manuel 13). Plato's *Republic* (circa 380 BC, first translated into English 1763) was a work that Ruskin also found attractive. Ruskin reaffirmed More's importance and added Plato to his scheme at the beginning of year three of *Fors* when, in *Letter 37* he wrote:

> The laws required to be obeyed by the families living on the land will be,—with some relaxation and modification, so as to fit them for English people,—those of Florence in the fourteenth century. In what additional rules may be adopted, I shall follow, for the most part, Bacon, or Sir Thomas More . . .. (28.23).

This identification of More as one of the lawmakers on his lands was followed with a passage from the *Republic* in which readers found further guidelines on how to live, including how not to spend leisure time. Ruskin's footnote to the text identified "hunting, shooting, and the like" as unsuitable entertainment (28.24 Ruskin's footnote). From Plato, Ruskin also took the rules of strict

[12] See Nicolas Shrimpton's essay "Politics and Economics" on Communes and Ruskin the Communist (*Cambridge Companion* 116-129).

hierarchy and, emerging from it, absolute obedience to those higher up in the community. He also borrowed the belief that people were born into and died in the same social status. Within their station, and using associated talents and abilities, all were expected to work for the good of the entire community.

Despite revering More, Ruskin was averse to calling his vision Utopian fearing the associated stigma of unachievable fantasy. He worried that there was real danger of that as his plans were not compatible with the accepted norm. He writes of his predicament:

> . . . if I told [readers], or tried to help them definitely to conceive, the ultimate things I aim at, they would at once throw the book down as hopelessly Utopian; but if I tell them the immediate things I aim at, they will refuse to do those instantly possible things, because inconsistent with the present vile general system. (28.254)

Given in fragments or in full, Ruskin did not consider his plan to be "hopelessly Utopian"—unachievable—at all. He thought it something that had already been seen in practice through centuries and as such could be easily returned to. Manuel and Manuel would see this attitude as a symptom of a "nostalgia for an idealized bygone human condition" shared by western Utopians (5). Sliding into this classification, Ruskin asserted that small land-based communities had "been the actual life of all glorious human states in their origin" (27.143-44). Even if it had not, Ruskin argued such perfect happy communities would still be possible to create using an intriguing argument of humans having already created "unimaginable evil" and so being also capable of creating "unimagined good" (27.144).

Despite Ruskin's assertions that his vision was not one, "Utopia" or "Utopian" are words that appear often in scholarly assessments of his work. Cook and Wedderburn (1906), Harris (1985), Batchelor (2001), Eagles (2007), Albritton and Albritton Jonsson (2016) all casually use it, perhaps in an unvoiced comparison to other unlikely schemes. Despite—or maybe because of—the chasm between Ruskin's theory and his followers' practice on St. George's lands, it is impossible not to consider some elements of Ruskin's vision as far-fetched and Utopian. For example, when he envisaged the movement spreading across Europe and growing to require a highly-structured and organised chain of command (28.424, 427); or

when he discussed the currency on his lands, its value, methods of circulation, and the system of prices measured against food and cloth (28.429). In the more achievable of its goals, Ruskin's scheme resembles some earlier or contemporaneous land-based Utopias and the Totley community, discussed in the next section, sometimes appears in works on that topic. For example, Marsh considers Ruskin's Totley another in a long history of English "religious and millenarian communes of this kind" and likens it to Chartists schemes (93); Dennis Hardy too compares Ruskin to Fergus O'Connor, one of the founders of Chartism—a comparison that Ruskin loses (*Alternative Communities* 78-81). Writing on Ruskin's politics rather than Utopias, P.D. Anthony (2009) nonetheless sees "shades of the Digger experiment" in Ruskin's plan to prove that poor land, when properly managed, can support people (183).

In their history of *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979), Manuel and Manuel consider late eighteenth century as the moment of transition from writing Utopian fiction to practical experiments; from being an adventure, Utopias became "a question of political action: How do you change a present misery into a future happiness in this world?" (3). The authors go even further back in time when considering the most common catalysts for Utopian thinking in England: the political and social upheavals of the Civil War or the Industrial Revolution. The latter significantly changed the modes of production and organisation of labour in England, not only triggering Utopian thinking, but also facilitating the dissemination of Utopian thought through advances in printing and low price of paper. Leaflets could now be composed, printed and distributed at considerable speeds and increasing literacy levels among the working classes meant increased readership. Although not a cheap leaflet, *Fors Clavigera*, I would argue, could be classed among such materials when taking into account the speed and ease with which Ruskin could have it printed.[13]

[13] Paul Dawson and Stephen Wildman's *George Allen of Sunnyside* (2007) provides the details of Ruskin's publishing venture and a general overview of what the printing process was like in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Looking for echoes of other Utopians in Ruskin, seventeenth century Diggers (1640s-50s) could be seen as Ruskin's earliest real, as opposed to More's fictional, predecessors. Protesting against increasing enclosures of common land, their leader Gerrard Winstanley supposedly had a vision from God who told him that people should "work . . ., eat bread together" and ". . . manure and work the common land" (Armytage 16). Therefore, Diggers would take possession of village or town commons on which they then would set up camps and farm. To the plan of making "barren land fruitful" through planting it up, Winstanley later added details on education for the people and an organised system of trade and distribution of the crops (20, 25). Not working on God's orders or intending to have people work on land other than owned or tenanted by them, Ruskin's scheme nonetheless resembles Diggers' in his obsession of putting "barren land"—unused or of poor quality—under cultivation. A detail in the Diggers' story has a tantalising, if purely coincidental, connection to Ruskin: the site of Diggers' first group dig was a common at St. George's Hill, Weybridge. As a patron saint of England, "St. George's" is undoubtedly a popular place name, but that the Diggers should choose George the earth-worker's field for their first protest and that Ruskin chose him as a patron for land-management company the Guild, is an interesting connection.

In the eighteenth century, the Moravian movement bears some resemblance to St. George's scheme. Originating from Germany, the Moravian Brethren first arrived in in England in 1743. Inspired by God's word like Diggers, unlike them, they lived and worked on their own estate (Armytage 48). Deriving income from land and a clothing business, the Moravians put all profits into the community (49-57). Ruskin's tenants were allowed their own fortunes and plots of land, but his system of putting money from rents back into the estates has a Moravian ring. Undemocratic and somewhat hierarchical—the elders of the group made all decisions—the organisation of Moravian life is also resonant of what Ruskin anticipated as life under St. George's Law.

The popularity of community-based Utopian schemes increased noticeably in the nineteenth century in what Hardy sees as a response to the "new society . . . of an increasing scale of organisation and growing detachment of the individual" (*Alternative Communities* 9). Often contained in model towns or villages,

nineteenth century communities were either "conservative" or "progressive" in their attitude to the feudal past—idealising or rejecting it—and relied on the philanthropy of rich patrons or popular subscriptions (11-12, 10). Meeting the "conservative" criterion, Ruskin is somewhere between the philanthropist/collector dichotomy and difficult to class as a model-builder as well. Although collecting subscriptions for the St. George's Fund, he was its most generous donor without whose contributions little would have been achieved; on the one hand a meticulous planner of his community, on the other a reluctant order-giver or overseer of practice, Ruskin both has a lot in common with and stands out from nineteenth century Utopians. His scheme shares similarities with co-operationists (ethical business benefitting the members of the community) and even industrial socialists such as Robert Owen or Titus Salt (criticism of the factory system, importance of access to parkland and home gardens for growing flowers and food). Among the most similar are of course purely land-based schemes, which, even if of different ideologies, were all united by their commitment to the land. Hardy divides such movements into three groups: Chartists in the late 1840s "emerging from the frustrations and disappointments of popular radicalism and working-class action in the preceding years"; those inspired by "the romantic revival of medievalism" which he associates with Ruskin and William Morris; and "home colonies" and "back to the land" movements in the later part of the century (75). My focus here will be on Chartists.

Authoritarian and opposed to "co-operative schemes based on equality," Ruskin was not a supporter of Chartism and did not want to be associated with the movement (Goldsmith 21). The fundamental difference between Chartism and Ruskin lay in their attitude to land ownership. Fergus O'Connor, one of the founders of Chartism, saw land as belonging rightfully to the people and landlords as usurpers. His rationale was that it first needs to be returned to its rightful owners for them to respect the social order and the country's institutions (Armytage 227). Ruskin's view was entirely opposite. Of the conviction that landowners had a God-given right to their land and a duty to preserve it, he instructed them in *Fors*: "Whatever labour you mean to put on your land, your first entirely Divine labour is to keep hold of it" (28.152). His other argument against common ownership of land

was more practical: ". . . the divided lands will not give much more than the length and breadth of his grave to each mob-proprietor" (28.152). In other words, parcelled out equally between all, the land would no longer be enough to support the new owners.

Different in ideology, Ruskin and O'Connor were a little similar in methods. Both set up bodies to buy and manage land and collected subscriptions for their cause: Ruskin expected a tenth of subscribers' income and had 30 regular subscribers; O'Connor asked for very small subscriptions and collected 70.000 subscribers (Armytage 235). Both also appealed directly to the working-class man, Ruskin through *Fors*, O'Connor through shorter writings and live appearances to "small, working-class communities" (*Alternative Communities* 76). At the height of its popularity in the late 1840s, Chartism had 600 branches across the UK and six settlements, but its success was short-lived. Most estates were found by government inspections to be mismanaged and were shut down. Distraught by the failure of the "peasant republic" he wanted to establish, O'Connor's mental health collapsed (Armytage 231, 235)—a final, sad, resemblance to Ruskin, even if brought about by different circumstances.

Several other nineteenth century agrarian projects were similar to Ruskin's, but none as prominent as Chartism. For example, William Allen's *Colonies at Home* scheme (1820s) explored "the best ways in which a poor man and his family could best live on two acres of land" (87). Echoed in Ruskin's much later Brantwood experiments on a worker's garden, Allen's scheme involved inexpensive cottages with plots of land and cheap schooling for children and relied on loans from benevolent patrons (88-89). Sharing with Ruskin the desire to purchase wasteland, in 1832 one Elijah Dixon hoped to purchase land from subscriptions and establish a co-operative community outside Manchester (140). Slightly more successful than Dixon's venture, William Hodson's 1930s rural settlement Manea Fen was as far removed from Ruskin's vision as possible although based on the same writings by Plato and More (145-47). A communist, egalitarian and scientific settlement it was similar to Ruskin's Totley both in being rife with conflict and supporting itself less from land and more from catering to curious visitors. Also inspired by Plato and More, in 1841 John Minter Morgan tried to establish villages under the supervision

of the Church. This plan envisaged the villages' inhabitants to be factory workers who would also take up farming on factory land (209-11). It is not impossible that Ruskin was familiar with the scheme: William Cowper, Lord Mount Temple and husband of Ruskin's friend Mrs Cowper-Temple was acquainted with Morgan. Like him, Ruskin may have been collected by the Cowper-Temples as one of the exotic Utopians they liked to support and thus kept up-to-date with Utopian schemes. Even Sheffield, where later Ruskin bought the Totley farm, was trialling a scheme very similar to Ruskin's. Twenty-five years before his pamphlet *Notes on the General Principles of Employment for the Destitute and Criminal Classes* (1868) Sheffield Town Council established land colonies for the poor where paupers were given an opportunity to support their families from agricultural work. Active until the mid-1850s, the not-for-profit estate did well and was seen by the town and parish as a scheme of "moral and economic advantages" (246-48).

Although similar to so many Utopian schemes, Ruskin's should not be called Utopian at all in the opinion of one scholar. Graham A. MacDonald sees it as being about a "small-scale rural reconstruction and recovery . . . [of] essential social virtues" and not a universal movement the effect of which would upturn the existing governmental status quo (128-30). In MacDonald's view, Ruskin's land-buying scheme and the Guild of St. George were "experiment[s] designed to affect changes in public law through osmosis via pilot projects functioning properly under the British Constitution" and as such did not meet the "Utopian" criteria (130). In my view, the main unifying factor of all Utopian schemes across centuries was the improvement of living conditions of the lower classes. Agrarian Utopias saw this improvement in living standards as rooted in the land and dependent on proper care of it and so Ruskin may be placed among them. His originality lies in the environmental element: while other agrarian communities understood the need for, what could today be called, sustainable land use, their reason for this was only maximising yields. Important to Ruskin too, he also considered the effect of, and saw the connection between, human activity—agrarian and industrial—on nature.

Ruskin's Rural Communities in Practice

Alongside monetary gifts to the St. George's Fund, Ruskin would accept gifts of land. In *Letter 11* of Fors, he promised: "if any one [sic] cares to help me with gifts of either money or land, they will find that what they give is applied honestly . . ." (27.197-98). The first to respond with such a contribution was the Mayor of Birmingham, George Baker. Baker had recently bought for himself a substantial estate in Bewdley, Worcestershire and offered a very small portion of it to Ruskin in 1871. At the time, Ruskin was not in a position to accept the offering as his St. George's Company, which would be responsible for management of such land, was not yet legally established. By the time the Bewdley plot was accepted, Baker had increased the acreage offered and Ruskin had received another donation: freehold land and eight cottages in dire need of repair in Barmouth in North Wales. Gifted by his friend Mrs Fanny Talbot in 1875, Barmouth joined Bewdley in being the only two land donations in Ruskin's lifetime.[14] Two more were given or bequeathed to the Guild in 1930s and 1940s: a field of limestone grassland known now as St. George's Field in Sheepscombe, Gloucestershire, and nine houses in the village of Westmill, Herefordshire (Eagles, *After Ruskin* 59). Using money collected in the Fund, Ruskin bought two more smallholdings: Totley in Sheffield (1876) and Cloughton Moor in Yorkshire (1878). I consider Totley, Cloughton and Bewdley to be the only real attempts at living out Ruskin's ideals of self-sufficiency expressed in *Fors Clavigera* and so do not discuss the other possessions in this thesis.

Ruskin did not seem to visit any of the properties much nor is he his usual loquacious self when discussing them in *Fors* and Guild documents. A longer mention of Bewdley was made in *Letter 80* (1877) after Ruskin's first and only visit and he praised the beauty of the location "in the midst of a sweet space of English hill and dale and orchard, yet unhurt by hand of man" (29.179). Beautiful and remote, he considered not having tenants on it, but leaving the site uncultivated or possibly even using it as a location for a museum (Wardle and Quayle 8-9). The ultimate decision on the management of the land was eventually left to Baker—for

[14] Ruskin and the Guild also owned non-rural properties: an estate in Marylebone, London and a cottage in Walkley, Sheffield.

better or worse—who had built a house nearby and could be on site to oversee any work. I discuss Bewdley's fortunes under Baker's management and after in Chapter 2.

Cloughton, apart from being listed among Guild properties in the Introduction to *The Museum and Guild of St. George*, is also not discussed in much detail. Ruskin's editors wrote that the estate was "three-quarters of an acre, with a cottage" and bought in order '"to establish in useful work' a member of the Guild, Mr. John Guy, who had put himself into communication with Ruskin through *Fors Clavigera*." Cook and Wedderburn also wrote that Ruskin thought Guy "a brave and gentle Companion" (27.xxvii-xxviii). Ruskin himself reprinted some of Guy's letters in *Fors* and wrote of him in the Master's Report for 1879 as being "capable of setting an example of practical and patient country economy [and having] not disappointed . . ." (30.21). Such mentions suggest that things were going well for the Guy family at Cloughton. Yet, as Cook and Wedderburn laconically mention, the tenants moved out in 1882 "and emigrated" (30.xxviii). Eagles sees this as "a bitter blow for Ruskin" but does not elaborate (*After Ruskin* 59); it is only thanks to Mark Frost's *The Lost Companions* that the Guy family's difficult time under Ruskin's Mastership was unveiled (179-184). The land at Cloughton was eventually sold by the Guild in 1910.

Totley was given considerably more space in *Fors* than either Cloughton or Bewdley as Ruskin seemed to have high hopes for it. In April 1877 Ruskin revealed that he was going to buy 13 acres of land in Sheffield for an estate that would be worked on according to Ruskin's principles. He writes of the venture in *Fors*: "A few of the Sheffield working-men who admit the possibility of St. George's notions being just, have asked me to let them rent some ground from the Company, whereupon to spend what spare hours they have, of morning or evening, in useful labour" (29.98). This suggests that the group did not intend to live on the estate or off its produce, as envisaged earlier in *Fors* of such settlements. It soon transpired that the "Sheffield working-men", had a different to Ruskin's understanding of "useful labour". Ruskin's excitement about his first real settlement is palpable in *Letters 78* and *79* (June-July 1877) in which he reported on preparations in Sheffield and mused on the organisation of life. He promised that the group would be looked

after but in return, they had to strive to produce as many good and useful things they could: “the simple question for each one of you, every day, will be, not how he and his family are to live, for your bread and water will be sure; but how much good service you can do to your country,” he instructs (29.148). However, by Autumn that year, there was trouble. Ruskin complained that there were “difficulties” in the “organization of work . . .. The root of all mischief is of course that the Master is out of the way, and the men, in his absence, tried at first to get on by vote of the majority; . . . “ (29.273). This report suggests that the group tried to run things in a democratic way rather than live in a Ruskinian autocracy. Problems persisted, the Totley project was eventually abandoned and written off as a failure by Ruskin scholars and laypeople alike (for example Armytage 1961 and Hewison 1981).

As with Cloughton, scholarship by Mark Frost revealed that there was more to Totley than reported by Ruskin and those attempting to uphold his good name. Frost’s work helps to understand the group, their own shortcomings and Ruskin’s considerable role in the enterprise’s gradual collapse. It transpires that the Sheffield group were believers in democracy and communitarianism and keen to apply these beliefs on the ground. Not being able to afford to buy land, they asked Ruskin for a farm to rent and both sides entered into a “pragmatic” arrangement ignoring the sides’ different attitude to obedience and hierarchy (*Lost Companions* 136). In her *Thirteen Acres* (2017), a booklet inspired by Frost’s research, Sally Goldsmith speculates that Ruskin overlooked the unsuitability of Totley applicants because he was impatient to prove that his ideas from *Fors* could really work. Goldsmith writes that Totley presented an opportunity to prove these ideals and Ruskin hoped that the project “would herald in a new agrarian Golden Age . . . of honest labour, craftsmanship and beauty, with the men working like a company of monks” (28). Despite having little farming experience, at first things were not going badly for the group who sold farm produce as refreshments to visitors, a “rather modern idea of selling an idea of rural smallholding life as much as its products” (*Lost Companions* 140). The Totley group clearly understood and exploited the curiosity of people keen to see a commune—much like at William Hodson’s Manea Fen—but this had little to do with Ruskin’s idea of living off the land. Disorganised and without “a coherent plan,” the group “made poor decisions and failed to exploit [the]

opportunity" Ruskin had given them (143). Seeing them struggle, Ruskin invited an outsider to manage the farm. William Harrison Riley had been Ruskin's correspondent since 1872, and, like the Sheffield men, had a different vision to Ruskin's of how life on the farm should be organised. According to Frost, Riley had "an impassioned desire to see a socialist paradise on earth" and wanted "Ruskin's influence and wealth [for] his plans for socialist co-operativism, while Ruskin wanted to channel Riley's convictions into beliefs closer to his own" (160, 163). However, the differences in outlook were too big and cooperation between the two men did not work out. First trying to override the Sheffield men with Riley, Ruskin now adopted the same technique against him and sent down his gardener to take charge. Frost reveals that David Downs was a poor choice with a hidden agenda against the Guild and purposefully mismanaged the estate, but he had Ruskin's trust. Eventually, Riley left Totley and then, like Guy of Cloughton, also emigrated. Totley was rented out (and in 1929, sold) to a George Pearson who "transformed [it] into a thriving market garden" thus proving that the land there was not, like it had been claimed, poor, but just suffering from poor management (172).

There is a connection between Totley and Bewdley: William Graham, "the Guild's longest-serving worker" (119), worked and lived at both farms. His is another tale excavated by Frost and, as it begins the story of Bewdley, it is discussed in the next chapter.

The aim of this chapter was to prepare the ground for an account of Ruskin's followers' activities at Ruskin Land in Bewdley 1870s-2019. Offered as an answer to Ruskin's request in *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, Ruskin Land belongs to the organisation which traces its roots to and sees its objectives as set out in those letters (Guild of St. George *Articles of Association*). Therefore, it was appropriate to look at what this publication was and provide a synthesis of Ruskin's plans expressed within. Considering *Fors* as a work of literature, I offered a short analysis of its epistolary format and its significance for Ruskin's readers. Perpetually amazed at the survival (in some form) of Ruskin's nineteenth-century Utopian scheme to the present day, I also thought it fitting to include in this chapter a selective overview of other, much shorter-lived, Utopian

projects. Albritton and Albritton Jonsson write that “Ruskin’s followers in Lakeland inherited his Utopian vision and turned it into a practical culture of sufficiency” (176). Such an appraisal can be applied less confidently to his followers in other parts of England and this chapter ended with a short review of the first efforts to put Ruskin’s agrarian vision into practice. The next chapter takes Ruskin’s theory from *Fors* to Wyre Forest and places it in the hands of members of his Guild living and working there in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Chapter 2: Ruskinians in Bewdley

> But this is not only a remembrance, it is part of a larger story which grew up and seemed to centre in, and gravitate to, this very countryside, where a piece of one of the least changed of English oak coppices still keeps the wildness of a thousand years, and where the undulating landscape of oak wood pied with bright green larch, makes a feeling like a sea of trees rolling up wild and free, to the very doors of our houses. (Scott, *Beloved* 136)

In 1921, after close to forty years as a Companion of the Guild of St. George, Edith Hope Scott published her last and longest novel, *The Beloved*. Its literary value may be uncertain and it did not lift her out of the status of an "Unknown Author," as she called herself in her unpublished *Autobiography* (*Autobiography* 1). Its importance lies in providing a glimpse into the world of a group of Ruskin's followers who decided to live out his teachings in rural Worcestershire. In the novel, romance meets Ruskinian ideals in the beautiful backdrop of the Wyre Forest. Many of Scott's characters are recognisable as being based on specific members of the Ruskin Liverpool Society who settled there between the 1880s and 1910s. Scott was a very active Companion of the Guild and a prolific writer, and we owe to her an insight into the life of the organisation and some of its members in the early twentieth century. Her poems, novels, short stories and letters, as well as her unpublished autobiography, help paint a picture of how Ruskin's vision from *Fors Clavigera* was translated into practice of "colonising England" (*Beloved* 17)—on a local scale, in Bewdley. A curious mix of realism and idealism, Scott's letters and fiction seem an honest, if occasionally exaggerated (particularly when recounting successes) account of settler life. In this chapter, they form the chief source of information about the 1880s to 1930s history of the settlement in Bewdley. I also used quotations from *Beloved* to provide a setting where available: even with fictionalised place and character names, the extracts accurately describe the surroundings and elements of the Bewdley community, still recognisable now

despite the passage of time. Some of them very pretty, they help visualise Ruskin Land in place of photographs.

Scott's accounts make it seem the Liverpudlians were the first Guild Companions to settle in Bewdley—she repeatedly calls them "pioneers" in *Autobiography* (e.g. 118, 159, 161). It is true that they formed the first real Ruskinian community there; they also left successors who have looked after the Guild land in the Wyre ensuring its continuous existence through the turbulences of history and fluctuations of Guild involvement. However, Mark Frost's investigations in *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George: A Revisionary History* (2014) show that there were Guildspeople in the Wyre in the 1870s and 80s and their devotion to the cause rivalled that of the Liverpudlians, who arrived later. The failure of one group and the success of the other depended on many factors and I discuss them here. This chapter contains the first part of a two-part history of the only settlement inspired by Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* to survive to the present day: Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest. While Chapter 3 presents the most recent developments there, this second chapter concentrates on the period 1870s-2000s. First, it briefly looks at the settlement's location in Bewdley and Ruskin's association with the town; my discoveries regarding the actual size and cost of the Wyre land may require a change to be made to the existing narratives. Then follows the main body of the chapter, devoted to Ruskin's followers in the Wyre—Guild Companions, Masters and tenants—and their interpretation and application of his principles expressed in *Fors*. The lived experience of Ruskin Land is recounted in five episodic vignettes that take us through the one hundred and thirty years of the settlement, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

As the writer of *Fors*, originator of the land settlement plan, its main funder, and first Master of the organisation set up to oversee it, Ruskin rightfully dominated the first chapter of this thesis intent on synthesising his vision. The current chapter ends this dominance and allows Ruskin's followers to speak. Not all left their own accounts of their time at Ruskin Land and so, often, the more dominant personalities or confident writers take over the narrative (e.g. Scott). What is extant, offers an absorbing insight into the reality of Ruskin's Utopia and the move from theory to application.

The theory was Ruskin's agrarian vision for England's future economic and moral well-being. He saw the return to farming and living off the land as the only way to undo the social and environmental damage brought on by the Industrial Revolution. The fragmented instructions on how this was to be achieved, given in the monthly letters of *Fors Clavigera*, included the acquisition of small plots of land for the creation of self-supporting communities engaged in doing practical crafts and farming, in both unaided by machinery, and giving due consideration to the environment they lived in. To facilitate this, Ruskin established the Guild of St. George, an organisation that was to collect money for, obtain and manage the settlements. Through *Fors*, Ruskin called for subscriptions to the fund and donations of land. As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, the very first plot, 7 acres of woodland in the Wyre Forest in Bewdley, was offered in 1871 and Guild activity there began soon after. Since then, the area, known now as Ruskin Land, has been much increased in size and currently encompasses about 200 acres of woodland, pastureland, orchards and agricultural dwellings, with the most recent purchase by the Guild (a field) taking place in 2019.

Guild Companions have settled on and around Ruskin Land and the organisation has endeavoured to evoke the agrarian and environmental elements of its mission there. This, if evaluated through the prism of sustainability and community-building, has been done with varying success; in fact, it seems that for most of the time, the Guild concentrated on just fulfilling the basic obligation of "keeping" the land—to use the Biblical quotation favoured by Ruskin.[15] It is important to take into account the social and economic climate throughout the years; events such as the two World Wars or the Simple Life movement of the 1970s would have swept the Guild along and affected what the organisation did in the Wyre and this chapter is mindful of that. Equally important is that any instructions available to Companions were from the 1870s and 80s. Ruskin, although uncannily accurate and prophetic in his warnings against pollution and exploitation of resources and people, could not have foreseen certain political, social and scientific developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

[15] An Old Testament command "to dress the earth and keep it" used by Ruskin in *Fors* as essence of his message (29.137).

Infinite speculation is possible on what his attitude to the petrol-powered engine, electricity, nuclear energy, etc. would have been and whether he "would have approved" of what has been done on St. George's Land. Members of the Guild of St. George did try to imagine what their spiritual father would have wanted. Sheffield City Archives contain letter exchanges between Companions, Secretaries and Masters with musings on rents or animal control. One such letter from Cuthbert Quayle (local Companion and unofficial supervisor of Ruskin Land) to Bernard Wardle (Guild Secretary) dated 5 May 1951 reads: "I fully agree . . . that ground rents are far removed from Ruskin's idea of the right use of money" (SA GSG2).[16] Another, from Thomas Harvey (Guild Master) to Alexander Farquhason (Secretary), dated 22 February 1942, states: "I believe that Ruskin would not have approved any cruel method of eliminating the surplus deer" (SA GSG/AF/138). Even now, although considerably less often, such musings surface when difficult decisions need to be made or when Ruskin Land Companions are evaluating their work, e.g. in 2014 when the Guild Board was considering the installation of a sawmill at Ruskin Land (P34) or in 2018, when one participant in my ethnographic study (see Chapter 4) wondered "I don't know if Ruskin would approve [of what we are doing] . . . He probably would have done" (P9). This shows that the Guild has been trying to act in accordance with what it understands as being in the spirit of Ruskin's teachings while keeping up with the demands of the changing times and circumstances. The chronological five-episode story of Ruskinians in Bewdley presented in this chapter gives an account of that.

[16] GSG is Guild of St. George Collection held in the Sheffield Archives (SA). Citations include catalogue numbers and, where possible, dates and page numbers.

Bewdley and the Wyre Forest

> Somewhere in England you may step along a wide stone bridge spanning historic and romantic waters, and around the massive stone piers of which there float and twist the long green streamers of Sabrina's hair. When you have looked over the pillared stone balustrade, up and down the river to the bends which are barriers to the hilly and woody view either way, you pass along and very quickly find your feet in the street of an old March town, whose ancient and deserted riverways are the only remembrance of the days when the imports of England came up a long tidal river, and from these quays were distributed over the Northern and Midland counties. (Scott, *Beloved* 69)

Bewdley is a small town on the River Severn ("Sabrina" in Scott's novel[17]) in the county of Worcestershire. According to the Bewdley Civic Society webpages, the town traces its history back to the *Domesday Book* where Wribbenhall, now a part of Bewdley, is first mentioned. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the town is recorded under the name of *Beau lieu*, French for "beautiful place." St. George's estates having beautiful names was much to Ruskin's taste. In *Letter 80* of *Fors Clavigera* he writes: "Fors undertakes for pretty names to us, it seems,- Abbey-dale, Beau-lieu" (29.173).[18] Situated on a busy river and in close proximity to a vast forest and all its products, Bewdley was a prosperous town, its importance increased by it being a "March town" as Scott calls it—Bewdley once was in the dominion of Marcher Lords appointed by the Kings to protect England from Wales (Ashley). The town's trade relied on the Severn, which linked it with the industrial centres of the Black Country and Shropshire and brought barges loaded up with Bewdley's exports: timber, charcoal, leather products (tree bark was widely used by tanners in the area) and fruit (predominantly cherries) from the local farms. It seems that local soils are best suited for fruit trees rather than arable farming despite the claim made on *The Nature of Wyre—a Forest Relived*, an oral history collection, where a

[17] Probably named by Scott after the Roman name for the river or the Celtic goddess of the Severn.
[18] Abbey-dale was what Ruskin liked to call the Guild estate at Totley (also known as Mickley), Sheffield.

resident claimed that the local countryside has fertile fields and meadows (CD1, "Horses" 00:00:29-34). Today, this fruit-farming heritage is visible mainly in the names of local housing estates (e.g. Cherry Close, The Orchard). Turning orchards into suburbs has brought the forest much closer to the town than it would have been in Edith Hope Scott's times. In *Beloved*, she gives a description of the Wyre she was familiar with:

> The Forest is older than history, but only immense oak roots tell that, for the trees are seldom more than thirty or forty years old, and are surrounded with short dense oak scrub which grows on the oak stumps and are periodically cleared, so that any year, you may find a part of your dense and mysterious forest become a thinly wooded stretch of ground . . .. The ground between the trees is at such a time, scattered with fallen trees, and bundles of small wood, and knots and knobs of wood pleasant to gather for burning, and every variety of dead thin. And then there is the wonderful charcoal burnings, the circular mound of wood covered over with turf that looks so mysterious; and the charcoal burner's tent and usually his family, with the kettle on three sticks, and all the traditional gypsy look. (74-75)

Scott's description shows that the Wyre was being regularly thinned for the traditional forest industries such as the production of charcoal. "Mysterious" to a city-dweller, it was a lonely, low-income occupation whose "traditional gypsy look," romanticised here by Scott, was a sign of nomadic and austere life. This "working forest" past of the Wyre is now being reviewed at Ruskin Land in the search for sustainable sources of income and a quest to increase biodiversity, and I return to it in Chapter 3.

Known under its name since at least the *Domesday Book*,[19] the Forest covers about 6500 acres, and is classed today as ancient woodland, an area that has been wooded since at least AD 1600 (Woodland Trust). Today, much of the Wyre's territory is either a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a National Nature Reserve (NNR, Nat. England). Used for hunting and riding by the Marcher lords who owned it until the sixteenth century, it later reverted to crown property and saw an

[19] Although the spelling varies: the Forest of "Wire" or "Wyere" on sixteenth century maps available on the British Library webpages (British Library).

increase in wood-based industries relying on the trees being cut down "on a coppice rotation system" (*Nature of Wyre* CD2, "Trees" 00:03:50-52). Forest roads had horse-drawn timber haulers on them; lumberjacks, charcoal burners, and tanners were a common sight; foragers for food and wood, and even coal diggers looking for surface coal would have been seen in the Wyre (CD1, "The Working Wyre"). All of these workers bringing to the Forest a business it is largely lacking nowadays. Some of those workers would have lived on small forest farms, such as the now Guild-owned Uncllys, which is believed to have been a site of habitation since the sixteenth century (Iles and Iles, *Ruskin* 1). The most popular livestock kept on such smallholdings were chickens and pigs—perhaps because of their ability to forage for food in the undergrowth and so feed themselves—and local residents say that life was hard and they have been "never prosperous, but always capable" (CD1, "Farming" 00:00:26-28).

Bewdley and Ruskin

> It was almost like awaking into a new dream when at last we did find ourselves driving up the long, steep hill which was taking us home, and saw the lovely tower of Beauregard rising above the oak woods as if it were on tiptoe to see above the spirry pines that stood about it; and crested with the golden fish of its weather-cock which flashed back the sun. (Scott, *Beloved* 88)

Beauregard is the fictionalised name Scott gave Beaucastle, a neo-gothic mansion which still dominates the view for part of the way leading from Bewdley into the Forest. Its owner, the wealthy Alderman and then Mayor of Birmingham George Baker, was in fact the very first Ruskin sympathiser to think of settling in Bewdley. No evidence suggests that he was living out Ruskin's ideas of self-sufficiency there,[20] but he was the one to begin the history of the Bewdley settlement by offering land. As already briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, Baker was the first to respond to Ruskin's call for land donations articulated in *Fors* and offered

[20] Frost's findings show that Baker was in fact far removed from Ruskin ideologically (*Lost Companions* 174).

him a wooded plot in Bewdley. This would be cut out of his newly purchased estate in the Wyre and was initially seven acres (Wardle and Quayle 4; 29.160). Sometime later Baker must have increased the offered acreage as in 1875 and 1877 Ruskin wrote of it: ". . . I have been quietly drawing . . ., instead of going to see another twenty acres promised in Worcestershire," and "I am just going down to see the twenty acres which Mr. Baker has also given us in Worcestershire" (28.423, 29.164). That size, "twenty acres," seemed to have been taken from *Fors* and repeated, unquestioningly, in both scholarly and promotional writing mentioning Bewdley (e.g. Birch xxxiii; Eagles, *After Ruskin* 68; Hill 131; Guild of St. George). Even Edith Hope Scott, who had a house near the land in question and perhaps should have known better, repeated the acreage when writing of Bewdley: "The 20 acres of Ruskin land [sic] are there" (qtd. in Eagles, "Past Masters" 55). I believe this to be incorrect and the size of the plot to be actually just over twenty-six acres.

Scrutinising *Fors* and *The Museum and Guild of St. George* (vols. 27- 30 of Library Edition) for information on Bewdley when first drafting the current chapter, I came across a mention that made me suspect an error was made early on and then entered the Ruskin mainstream, uncorrected. In his first Master's Report (1879) prepared for the first general meeting of the Guild, Ruskin gave a list of the "landed property" the organisation had. Point (ii) reads "The Bewdley Estate, consisting of 26 acres and 6 perches of land, adjoining or near to Powcastle Farm,[21] in the borough of Bewdley, in the county of Worcester" (30.19). Ruskin's absence at the meeting meant that the Report was read out by George Baker, the offerer of the land who would have known its size, and so I was inclined to believe in the accuracy of the numbers given. Intrigued, I went back to the issues of *Fors* quoted above, and realised that Ruskin wrote "another" and "also given" next to "twenty acres" (28.423, 29.164)—and so appeared to be talking about land expanded *by* rather than *to* twenty acres. Dr Stuart Eagles, the Ruskin scholar and once Guild Secretary whose opinion on the matter I sought out, agreed that my reasoning seemed good and that if the plots offered by Baker measured both just under seven and twenty acres, together they could be 26 acres and 6 perches—which is just

[21] Another interesting detail in that Report, accompanied by an unfairly dismissive Editors' note on the name.

over 26 acres (Eagles. Personal email. 29 Oct. 2018). The deeds to the land held in the Guild's solicitors' office confirm the plot size was "26 acres and 6 perches or thereabouts" and the attached map gives it as "26A.0A.6¼P." (Conveyance, 1 Sept. 1876). It seems, then, that the size has been misreported in literature by approximately one quarter, a considerable amount. Partly to blame for this may be the editors of the Library Edition of *Fors* and *Guild*, Cook and Wedderburn whose—incorrect—footnotes readers may have taken as true. Ruskin's first mention of Bewdley, "a pretty little gift of seven acres of woodland, in Worcestershire," is annotated with "At Bewdley. There seems, . . . to have been some delay on Ruskin's part in formally accepting the gift, which was ultimately increased to twenty acres . . .." (27.160, footnote 2). They repeat "twenty acres" in other footnotes or their introductions to *Fors* and *Guild* (e.g. 28.607, 30.13); Ruskin's occasional slip into just "twenty acres" would not have made it easier for the interested readers (e.g. 28.607, 30.50).

It may seem strange that Ruskin should not give the size of the Bewdley land more precisely, or at least imprecisely round the number up to thirty or down to twenty-five. However, his bookkeeping for the St. George's Fund, examples of which can be found in volumes 27-30 of the Library Edition, show a curious mix of mathematical precision and mild vagueness. Perhaps "twenty acres" was simply in keeping with that. However, in keeping with neither would be an omission of £500, a sum too large to be vague about (about £30000 today).[22] This amount, given on the land conveyance documents that I consulted looking for the size of the Bewdley plot, puts into question the "gift" aspect of Bewdley. Reported in *Fors* and *Guild* as "given" or a "gift" (e.g. 28.607, 27.160, 30.50, 30.xxvi), the conveyance shows that somehow money changed hands and that it happened twice. Two deeds to the land are in the Guild's possession today: one dated 1 September 1876 and the other dated 19 April 1879. There are two because of Ruskin's desire to be able to begin work on the estate unhindered by the trouble in establishing the St. George's Company/Guild. Unwilling to accept it in his own name and eager to bypass the problem of the legal delay with the Company, Ruskin had the Bewdley property first

[22] According to the currency converter available on the National Archives website.

transferred from Baker to three female Companions, Dora Livesey, Fanny Talbot and Juliet Tylor (Frost, *Lost Companions* 122). Three years later, when the Guild had been registered by the Board of Trade, the land was transferred from the three women to the new organisation. Both conveyance deeds show that a sum of £500 was involved in the transaction, but no information on that can be found in volumes 27-30 of the Library Edition. The original 1876 deed describes the act thus: ". . . George Baker and Jacob Hort Player are seized of the hereditaments hereinafter expressed to be hereby granted in fee simple in possession of the same hereditaments free from incumbrances [sic] at the price of five hundred pounds . . ." and acknowledge the receipt of said sum from Misses Tylor, Livesey and Talbot (Conveyance, 1 Sept. 1876). Read with the help of the Oxford Dictionary of Law, the extract states that the two men are in possession of the inheritable property which from now onwards is considered transferred with absolute title to the land and with the same hereditary rights and free from any legal or financial claims for the price of £500 which they confirm to have received from the three women (Law and Martin). A clause to that effect can also be found in the 1879 conveyance where it was confirmed that the women paid £500 to Baker and Player and therefore, the Guild was now paying the same amount to them (Conveyance, 19 Apr. 1879). What kind of an arrangement it really was, and why was it not explained or acknowledged by Ruskin or Cook and Wedderburn anywhere in *Fors* or *Guild*, I am currently unable to say. More research is needed to explain this mystery and perhaps there might be a need to update the existing narratives on the origins of Guild land.

Gifted or bought, Bewdley was now "St. George's land," as Ruskin liked to call his properties (e.g.28.46, 734). In 1877, when recounting his only visit to Bewdley in *Letter 80* of *Fors*, Ruskin reported: "[Mr. Baker] has shown me St. George's Land, his gift, in the midst of a sweet space of English hill and dale orchard, yet unhurt by hand of man" (29.164). Ruskin's account seems enthusiastic, but his claim that the Forest was untouched would not have been strictly true. As Scott has already told us, the Forest was being used as a timber resource and was home to people involved in wood industries. Regular thinning was a practice that made the Wyre, although ancient, be now considered "semi-natural woodland" (Westwood et al. 26). Ruskin would have been aware of that as he himself

described the Wyre plot earlier to be "in copsewood" (sic) (28.607). A copse or coppice is a wooded area where trees are regularly cut down at the base to make them regrow thicker (Natl. Trust)—hardly an area "unhurt by the hand of man." There was even a railway running through the Forest; in fact, the much-despised by Ruskin trains would have passed regularly in close proximity to the northern border of the estate.[23]

Since the land was "in copsewood" and Ruskin's goal was to have food-producing estates, he decided that clearing should commence straight away. In Spring 1876, so even before the conveyance to Livesey, Tylor and Talbot was completed, Ruskin wrote: "I have given leave to two of our Companions to begin work on the twenty acres of ground in Worcestershire . . .. The ground is in copsewood; but good for fruit trees; and shall be cleared and brought into bearing as soon as the two Companions can manage it. We shall now see what we are good for, working as backwoodsmen, but in our own England" (28.607). Mark Frost found it suspicious that Ruskin mentioned two Companions working in Bewdley in 1876, despite the fact that Edith Hope Scott in *Ruskin's Guild of St. George* (1921) and later Peter Wardle and Cedric Quayle in *Ruskin in Bewdley* (2007) began the story of Bewdley Ruskinians in 1889, with the arrival in the Forest of Thomas and Margaret Harley of Liverpool. Thanks to Frost's investigative work published in *Lost Companions*, I can begin my history of Ruskin Land with its true first settler, William Buchan Graham.

Episode 1: 1878-1886 William Graham

> Can you see it? A long avenue of trees with a wide lane of greenest grass sloping down to the straight line of fir trees which stand as guards and sentinels along the edge of the land. (Scott, *Beloved* 51)

This is how one of Scott's heroines, Georgia, describes the orchard at St. George's Farm and the avenue of dark fir trees that lined the road bordering the estate.

[23] The Wyre Forest train station and line opened in 1869 and the tracks ran approximately 1 km from what became St. George's Farm. Even after the line finally closed in 1962, Ruskin Land has not been free from steam trains. The historic Severn Valley Railway trains run through Bewdley many times a day between Spring and Autumn and the steam whistle is as much a forest sound now as it would have been in Ruskin's day.

Georgia does not speculate how the land came to look that way and neither does Scott in any of her writing. She does not muse on who may have cleared this plot of land in the middle of the forest and whose fruit trees the characters in her novel were looking at. As far as she was concerned, any activity in Bewdley was started by the Liverpudlians and all that was there before had been just "a derelict attempt at cultivation" (*Ruskin's Guild* 105–06). It is possible she may not have known of a former Companion called William Buchan Graham who had toiled on this land. This episode recounts a story much less happy than the one in Scott's *Beloved*, a time of authoritarianism combined with lack of involvement form the then Master of the Guild, John Ruskin. The account relies heavily on Mark Frost's book *Lost Companions* (2014). Not intending to summarise his entire excellent work, this thesis extracts only the key facts about this first episode of Guild activity in Bewdley. These are supplemented by the scarce information provided in Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* and *The Guild and Museum of St. George*.

In 1877 Ruskin reported in *Fors*: "I have ordered the immediate clearing of about the fourth part [of the woodland]; this is being done under Mr. Baker's kind superintendence: the cheque for £100 under date 5th May in the subjoined accounts is for this work" (28.164). The cheque would have been for the Crump family who were commissioned to fell the tress (Wardle and Quayle 53). The accounts Ruskin attached indeed show payment to "Baker" under the date 5 May in Expenses. However, the column shows that more than just the £100 had been spent at Bewdley: on the 5 March, £5 was given to "Graham" (28.164). The word "wages" stands next to these entries in *Financial History of St. George's Guild 1871-77* together with a second entry dated 30 May of a further £20 payment (30.140). Graham's name also appeared in a letter from Ruskin to George Baker reprinted in *Guild*: "I am most thankful to hear of Graham's prosperity and good conduct," wrote Ruskin to which Cook and Wedderburn supplied a laconic footnote "A Tenant of the Guild" (30.303, footnote 2). These references to Graham only become noticeable in *Fors* and *Guild* when we already know to look out for them—and that is due to Frost's revealing tale of this "longest-serving agricultural Companion" (*Lost Companions* 11).

From Frost we learn that William Graham first contacted Ruskin in 1876 and was taken on as a Companion. Attracted by Ruskin's rural settlement plan, Graham left his employment as a lithographer in Glasgow and, after a series of Ruskin-ordered apprenticeships on unsuitable farms, arrived in Bewdley in May 1878. Barely four months into Graham's post there, Ruskin seemed to have already abandoned the idea of establishing any tenants on Guild lands. In August 1878 Ruskin wrote to Baker:

> Since my illness, I have given up all hope of instituting any modes of *habitation* on St. George's ground, and as long as the present Master lives . . . the Company must be content with merely vegetarian successes, for all the land at my command I shall keep under leaves. . .. Whatever you have done, or propose doing, in this kind, at Bewdley, will be wholly delightful to me . . .. (30.303)

The letter shows that Ruskin was not only departing from his original plans of establishing permanent human settlements on Guild land, but that he was also completely uninterested in personally managing the estates. Possibly discouraged by the situation on his other farm, Totley in Sheffield, Ruskin left Bewdley in the care—and total control—of George Baker. This was a decision Frost considers "forever . . . questionable" as Baker was a man of different political and social convictions to Ruskin's; according to Frost, "Birmingham business ethics ultimately dominated Bewdley: Baker treated Graham precisely as a subordinate in a capitalist economy, and only the most harmfully authoritarian strands of St George's rule [were] exercised" (132; 174).

Even by "capitalist economy" standards, Graham was mistreated: he earned three times less a year than agricultural workers outside Guild land (187). Perhaps fuelled by his idealism and loyalty to Ruskin, Graham toiled on the estate and experimented with growing crops on the poor forest soil: black oats, potatoes, beans and strawberries, as he recollected in materials quoted by Frost (175). He also kept pigs and started planting the beautiful orchard that Scott later described in her novel (*Beloved* 172). It is unclear how much or if any of the produce grown on the land sustained Graham and how much went to local markets. Guild accounts show that some produce from the estate was sold in the early 1880s, making it

possible that some of Graham's experiments worked, but expenditure was much higher than profits: e.g., £32 worth of produce to £106 invested in 1881 (30.143). The accounts do not give an explanation for the disparity between the amounts or provide details of the investments, but these do not seem to have been directed towards implementing any of Ruskin's plans if Graham's criticism of Baker is to be believed. As recounted in Frost, Graham hoped for a community of settlers living and working together on the land, but Baker preferred to "let" the land as a game breeding and hunting site (qtd. in *Lost Companions* 177). Frost does not ask the question of who profited from the arrangement if the land was being thus "let." With a loss of £74 in 1881, it seems to me unlikely it would have been the Guild.

The community of settlers desired by Graham would have required housing on the estate, but this did not seem forthcoming after Ruskin's announcement in 1882 that the area was so beautiful "that I am content at present in our possession of it, and do not choose to break the quiet of its neighbourhood by any labourer's cottage building" (30.50).[24] This meant not even a cottage for Graham, or not without strings attached as in the offer Baker made him (*Lost Companions* 177-78). A house was eventually built there, but not until 1906-7, long after Graham had left Ruskin's employment.

Graham briefly tried to begin a community at Ruskin Land himself: Frost reports that Graham invited the Guy family to come to Bewdley when they left Cloughton, but Baker and Ruskin did not allow them to stay and work with Graham (185). Deteriorating health and disillusionment with Ruskin and the Guild culminated in Graham's departure from the estate, and the organisation, in 1886. He stayed on in the area until his death in 1909 and is buried in a churchyard in Ribbesford, a hamlet outside Bewdley. In 2019 the Guild restored Graham's grave as part of the Heritage Lottery-funded project on telling the history of Ruskin Land.

[24] Although Ruskin did consider building a museum there (Scott, *Ruskin's Guild* 25-34).

Episode 2: 1889-1936 Liverpool Ruskin Society

> If I could take you down the lane which passes the cowslip fields . . . and then turns suddenly—like a fairy-tale—into a half-civilised and half-wild forest road! On one side a scattering of cottages with orchards and gardens always turning back into wood-wilds, if you take your hand off them for a moment; and on the other side just the forest . . .. When you have got past the last cottage, the lane becomes just a cart-track hemmed in with oak scrub and great bracken fern, and silted up with tall heather, and deep ruts, with hard ridges in dry weather. (Scott, *Beloved* 28-29)

Thus Edith Hope Scott, writing again as Georgia, describes the lane in which she and her friends and relatives from Liverpool built houses and began the second episode in the history of Bewdley. Compared to Graham's, theirs was a much more successful and sustained attempt at "re-colonising England" (Sept. 1922 letter, SA GSG24/2); I provide my assessment of why this might have been the case at the end of this section.

In 1883 a Ruskin Society was formed in Liverpool through an advertisement in the *Liverpool Post* (Wardle and Quayle 15). The Society read and discussed Ruskin's works and its members, some of whom had joined the Guild, were keen to implement his principles from *Fors Clavigera*. Scott recollected:

> . . . we set ourselves enthusiastically, crudely, foolishly . . . to make the Guild what Ruskin founded it to be—a beginning of an example of life founded on the cultivation of the land, and building up an ideal of life of all that is best and wisest in the arts of life, in education, in religion, in true political economy, in science and in the loyalties of national life." (A*utobiography* 135)

Their first attempt at this was in Wavertree, a then village-like suburb of Liverpool, where for about sixteen years they rented a cottage with a garden. It features often in Scott's prose and poetry where it is a haven and place of happiness. In the 1911 poem "The Garden" she wrote:

> A garden stands where town and country meet,
> A home of flowers,
> Remote behind high wall from noiseful street,

Sacred from crowds but thronged with happy feet,

And rich with happy hours. (1-5)

A place of meetings, dissemination of thought and agricultural experimentation, Mulberry Cottage was as close an attempt at rural community living as possible. The residents grew flax, wheat, fruit and a multitude of flowers and kept chickens and bees (Wardle and Quayle 19)—a mix to sustain, and dress, body and soul it seems. The Cottage was also the centre of their social lives and became the permanent home first of the Harleys and then the Wardles. An absorbing and detailed account of life there, and a useful Scott-Wardle-Fowler family tree, is included in Wardle and Quayle's *Ruskin in Bewdley* (2007). From the suburban garden, Thomas and Margaret Harley emigrated to a real smallholding in the Wyre Forest and became the first link in a chain of similar escapes to the country. Other members of the Mulberry Cottage group eventually followed them to Bewdley: Edith Hope Scott (1908), the Watsons (1911), the Fowlers (1912), the Quayles (1914); all inspired by the "pioneer work" of the Harleys (Scott, *Ruskin's Guild* 2). Each Liverpool family was part of "the foundational agricultural community around which other Guild activities could [be] built" that Frost believes could have been formed during William Graham's tenure at Bewdley if circumstances had been more favourable (*Lost Companions* 10).

This episode starts with Thomas and Margaret Harley's decision to leave Liverpool for the countryside in order to live out Ruskinian ideals. It ends with the death of Edith Hope Scott, Bewdley Companion, the Guild's first historian and the dominating voice of the period. On a larger scale, the period coincides with social and political changes such as the back-to-the land movement of the end of the nineteenth century and the first great conflict of the twentieth century, First World War. For the Guild of St. George, this was a time first of Ruskin's absentee Mastership, and then death and a pressing need to decide what the Guild was and wanted to be.

Ruskin's virtual silence in the decade or so before his death saw Companions reaching out to each other across England. For example, Scott connected the Liverpool circle to the Lake District Companions Albert Fleming and Marion Twelves. Keen to do practical work advocated by Ruskin in *Fors*, Scott wanted

advice on how to procure a spinning wheel and flax (*Autobiography* 172). The best people to ask seemed those who were involved in the Ruskin-approved Langdale Spinning Industry, Fleming and Twelves (Albritton and Albritton Jonsson 55-61). Left fatherless on Ruskin's death, Companions turned to George Baker for leadership. Baker had been close to Ruskin, was a Guild trustee and the manager of Bewdley land and his Mastership would offer a direct link to Ruskin and a degree of continuity. However, the Guild had no particular structure and no real projects to continue and came quite close to being dissolved altogether due to initial poor interest from Companions. Attempts at getting satisfactory numbers of Companions for General Meetings were unsuccessful at first and only after a persuasive letter from the Liverpool group did the Companions meet and decide the organisation was to continue (Scott, *Ruskin's Guild* 102-04).

In those first decades after Ruskin's death, the Guild's attention revolved around Sheffield, where there was a ready-made collection of art, and Wyre, with its ready-made Ruskinian community. In a small pool of scattered Companions, members of the Liverpool Ruskin Society, many of whom followed the Harleys to the Forest, formed a visible group committed to Ruskin's principles. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Guild seemed to rally around them; Bewdley was called the organisation's "nucleus" for years after Ruskin's death. In the words of Hugh Fairfax-Cholmeley, the Master 1925-1934, Bewdley was the most important of the Guild properties as it offered "a real opportunity of developing outwards from a visible nucleus with a history and tradition behind it. [Guild] activities there might develop in numerous directions that would bring [it] into contact with the general life of the Nation" (MR 1927-28, SA GSG3). Notably, the community began its existence not on Guild land per se; although there is no definite evidence as to what was happening on St. George's Land after William Graham's departure, in light of what Frost revealed in *Lost Companions* it is possible to assume that it was still being used as a game reserve. Perhaps because there were no agricultural buildings there until 1907, or because Liverpool Ruskinians preferred to have their own land to experiment on, they settled south of St. George's Land along St. John's Lane (see Fig. 2 below). These plots, albeit formerly part of Baker's Wyre Forest estate, were

the property of Companions and not the Guild.[25] I would argue that was a considerable factor that enabled a Guild Community to take root in the Forest. Private ownership of land meant that those second-wave Bewdley Ruskinians were not dependant on the approval, or dictatorship, of Ruskin, Baker or the Guild and could act when and how they thought was best for them and the land. Ruskin's eventual death also meant an increase in the particular enforced freedom of interpretation of his intentions as there was no hope he would ever explain them further. Moreover, Liverpool Ruskinians were already a tight-knit group of friends and family and they simply transplanted those links to Bewdley. Not lonely in the town like Graham, they arguably also had better farming "apprenticeship" than him—Wavertree Cottage was free of authoritarian management and offered a possibility to practise elements of communal living as well. Class and money are also contributing factors that cannot be ignored. Although not as wealthy as Ruskin and Baker and of a somewhat lower status, the Liverpudlians who settled in Bewdley under both men's Masterships were essentially of the same class;[26] there would not have been that prejudiced relationship that Frost writes existed between Graham and the two men (*Lost Companions* 174). Many of the Liverpudlians could also afford to experiment with self-sufficient living in a forest having had alternative sources of income available (family support, pensions, etc.). Lastly, Bewdley Ruskinians were a distinct faction in the Guild, strengthened additionally by a Bewdley Master G. Baker (1900-10), and Secretaries William Wardle (1901-1925), and briefly Cuthbert Quayle, Thomas Harley, Harrison Fowler and Edith Hope Scott (1924-25).[27] In Scott they also had an unofficial spokesperson. Scott's tireless advocacy of their cause in her work and correspondence, particularly with the fourth Master Henry Luxmoore, would have considerably contributed to the Guild's support and commitment to Bewdley.

[25] Since 1932 the Guild has owned a part of St. John's Lane, but this land runs along the side of the road opposite the cottages and has not been farmed (Wardle and Quayle 63).
[26] Baker was a businessman, Ruskin a merchant's son, Edith and Daisy Scott merchant sea captain's daughters, Quayles were merchants, and Thomas Harley worked for an insurance firm.
[27] Dearden, "Secretaries" 72, 74.

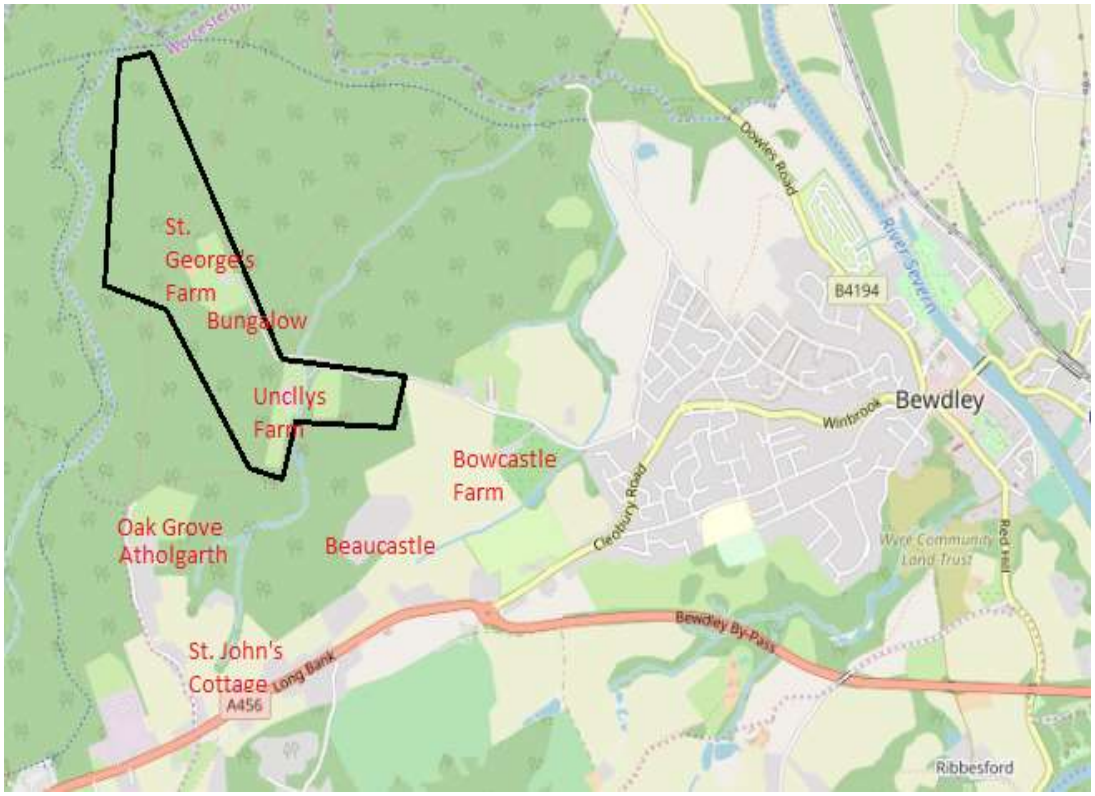

Fig. 2. Ruskinians in Bewdley: map of the area as in 2019, with approximate house locations and outline of Guild land now (*OpenStreetMap*, Dominika Wielgopolan).

St. John's Cottage 1889–1932 (St. John's Ln.)

> I need not explain what fate—no, not fate—but what freewill brought me and my Dearest here into a country cottage to live lives to which we were not born, but which was our contribution to the ferment of an epoch and the fate of pioneers in what we believed to be a great cause. (Scott, *Beloved* 180)

Thus does the eponymous heroine of Scott's novel describe how she and her husband came to settle in the Forest. The Beloved is Margaret Harley, Scott's friend and mentor from Mulberry Cottage, who with her husband Thomas—in the novel under a name with Ruskinian associations, Mr. and Mrs. St. George—left Liverpool for a new life in the Wyre. This one sentence reveals something of the Harleys' decision to move: they were educated, middle-class and genteel townspeople ("lives to which we were not born") who lived at a time of social, economic and political changes ("ferment of an epoch") and were influenced by Ruskin's plan for England ("great cause"). Scott's Ruskinism make her use of the word "fate" not

accidental as well. It could mean both *Fors Clavigera* the collection of Ruskin's letters that brought the Harleys to the countryside, or "Force, Fortitude and Fortune," the trio making up the word Fors (27.28). It is interesting that Scott undercuts "fate"—the Third Fors—by changing it to "freewill."

Thomas and Margaret Harley were among the earliest members of the Guild of St. George and the members of the Liverpool group most dedicated to Ruskin's ideals. They were, for a long time, the only ones to try to make a living according to his preaching leaving their city lives and occupations for the countryside and embracing the hard lives of smallholders with their only income from land. The Harleys wrote to George Baker who agreed to sell them a piece of his land, but why and how they first contacted him Wardle and Quayle call "a matter for interesting speculation" (Wardle and Quayle 29). Scott, who was close with Margaret Harley, sheds some light on this in her 1922 letter to the Master, Mr. Luxmoore:

> [The Harleys] spent some holidays in travelling about England and looking for a suitable spot upon which to settle. They finally came to Bewdley, saw the Ruskin land [sic] . . . talked the matter over with Mr. Baker, and finally decided to buy a piece of the Wyre Forest . . .. This decision was come to partly because of the Guild and Ruskin connection with the place, and partly because there was unlimited forest land to clear for those who should follow. (SA GSG24/2 2)

It seems possible that the Harleys hoped others would follow them and so saw this "unlimited land" as an attraction, but it is important to note that Scott's was a biased recollection of someone who had already seen this happen. In any case, the Harleys cleared a plot of land, built a house (St. John's Cottage) and began their lives as smallholders in St. John's Lane on the edge of the Wyre Forest.[28] City professionals, they had to teach themselves farming and made a success of it—that is to say, they managed to live off it for forty years. It is not clear how well or badly they were really doing. Wardle and Quayle quote two contradictory opinions of Scott's: the claim that the place was "a rich and beautiful fruit . . . and chicken farm

[28] Wardle and Quayle say that the cottage was named after the king, not the saint or Ruskin (35). Electoral registers for the district give the location as simply "Forest" in the early 1900s, "St. John's Lane" appears in 1912 (WA 50 21/280B, WA 55 23/296).

[that] was a livelihood for three families" is soon followed by "they looked as poor as they were—and were usually as poor as they looked" (29, 30). In the already quoted letter to Luxmoore, Scott declares that the farm "succeeded, through much suffering [which] is a triumph for the spirit" (GSG24/2 4). A triumph especially of Mrs. Harley's who was a "gently bred and accomplished woman . . . and at the worst—and there was a bad worst—has . . . never regretted it" (GSG24/2 2). It is a shame Scott does not give details of what the "bad worst" was. Tom Harley's letters suggest that they lived rather economically although he puts it down to the desire to use only articles produced very locally, "within walking distance," as this allowed for the development of personal relationships with the producers (qtd. in Wardle and Quayle 33). Five miles seemed a "walking distance"—Margaret Harley apparently walked to church in Kidderminster, approximately 5 miles each way, instead of taking the bus (35). It is difficult to say whether that was because of a rather modern concern over what we would now term the carbon footprint or because she could not afford the bus fare. Whatever the reason, we know that the Harleys' farm brought in enough money for them to survive and employ labourers on "the best agricultural wages in the countryside" (Scott 1922 letter, GSG24/3 1).

It is of course possible that, if the Harleys really were the dedicated and honourable people that emerge from Scott's writings, they will have chosen to go without themselves rather than not pay a fair wage to their labourers. They seem to have been very involved in the local Bewdley community: e.g. Mr. Harley regularly defended farmers' interests at the local Farmers' Union and was Justice of the Peace in the town (Wardle and Quayle 31). He seems also to have been in the farming avant-garde of the times—Scott reports that he "introduced new manures in the district, and was one of the first in the country to introduce the spraying machine, as well as practically revolutionising poultry-keeping" (1922 letter, SA GSG24/2 3). Scott gives no details of these innovations, so we can only wonder if the "spraying machine" was man-powered and the "manures" natural and if these improvements would have pleased Ruskin. The Harleys did seem to keep to some of Ruskin's wishes in the above-mentioned treatment of their labourers as well as their impeccable business ethics: "perfect service in the sale and distribution" of their produce, writes Scott (SA GSG24/2 3).

The couple were childless and after her husband's death Margaret Harley was unable to cope with the smallholding on her own. In 1932 she sold the cottage and land to one of her labourers and went to live further down St. John's Lane, at Atholgarth.

Atholgarth 1908–1936 (St. John's Ln.)

> [The deer] come into the fields and gardens, and you may have the thrill and rapture of seeing one or two browsing on your lawn and even on your rose-trees in the early quiet of the morning. I need not say that the romance of barked fruit-trees and rose-trees does not appeal to the hard utilitarianism of those who want crops of fruit trees or roses . . .. This very spring a great stag was killed in Miss Ann Bewley's orchard at Applegarth at the end of the lane. Miss Ann was torn between her duty to her neighbour's right to a fruit crop, and her own sympathy with the deer and pleasure in their visits. They gave her the skin, which she cherishes with a melancholy pride and uncertain joy, and always ends up any allusion to it with: "But I wish the poor, beautiful creature had its own skin and was enjoying itself." (Scott, *Beloved* 30)

Edith Hope Scott is present in several heroines of her novel, but Miss Ann Bewley of Applegarth seems entirely based on her. An unmarried woman with a surname missing just one letter to become "Bewdley," Miss Ann lives in Applegarth—the fictional version of Scott's Atholgarth and one which evokes the orchard setting. Miss Ann shares Scott's feelings towards the deer while also expressing a Ruskinian sentiment in acknowledging a farmer's "right to a fruit crop"; for Ruskin, hunting was only acceptable if the animals were in direct competition with humans for food and he writes in *Fors*: "if the [animal] takes more than his share, you may shoot him, . . . and not till then" (29.71). Scott's semi-permanent residence in Bewdley was made possible by her father, who in 1905 bought a piece of land in St. John's Lane and built there a cottage for her. The house, Atholgarth, had been designed by Scott "in keeping with the Ruskin ideal [of being] convenient for a small-holder [sic] and his family" after her departure (Wardle and Quayle 39-40). Out of the five-acre plot, four were kept as woodland and from thence came the deer. They liked to

help themselves to her flowers and fruit, which remains a common problem (or delight) for the Forest dwellers today. She thought it "very charming," but admitted that "[if] I were [a smallholder] my tone would be different!" (*Autobiography* 196). Scott did not begrudge deer her apples because she never had to depend on her holding for livelihood. Despite being the second Companion to build a cottage in Bewdley, she never settled there permanently. Very involved in her family life back in Liverpool, she also had a small teaching job to keep her in the city. Thus, she had never stayed at Atholgarth "for more than weeks at a time" making it instead available to family, friends and Guild Companions throughout the years (196). She liked to think that the Watsons and Quayles made their decision to move to Ruskin Land upon seeing it while staying at her cottage and felt privileged to have hosted Guild Masters there as well. She recollects:

> Two Masters of the Guild have visited me there, Mr. Baker and Mr. Luxmoore. Mr. and Mrs. Watson who went to live as Guild tenants on the land there which George Baker gave to Ruskin, saw it first when they stayed at my cottage; and Mr. and Mrs. Quayle, who later bought their own farm on that country-side, saw it first while staying there (197).

Atholgarth and the Bewdley countryside also offered refuge to her family during both World Wars and to Margaret Harley for ten years after Thomas's death (*Autobiography* 207; Wardle and Quayle 36). From the 1940s to 1990s, the cottage was still in Guild's hands and its owners were the Wardles (Quayle. Personal interview. 10 Dec. 2018).

<u>Oak Grove 1912–1919 (St. John's Ln.)</u>

> "The Oakery," the pretty little black and white house which is the last outpost of the mere world [before] the lane plunges into the wood. (Scott, *Beloved* 171-72)

People who, unlike Scott, lived in the Wyre Forest all year round, and who were much more dependent on their smallholdings than she was, were the Watsons, the Quayles and the Fowlers. Only the first two families settled in Bewdley permanently; the Fowlers found it too difficult to make a living there. The Fowlers

were Harrison Ruskin (named in an homage to the great John) and Margaret. Known popularly as Harry and Daisy, they were another couple united by the Mulberry Cottage experience. Daisy was Edith Scott's younger sister and both she and her husband left what Wardle and Quayle call "academic" lifestyles in cities to pursue Ruskin's ideal life in the country (47). In 1912 they moved into Oak Grove ("Oakery" in *Beloved*), a house at the forest end of St. John's Lane. They struggled to make ends meet from their attempts at making a living from "Art and Agriculture" (*Autobiography* 232). Fowler was an artist and a few of the original brass door-plates made by him have been preserved in Oak Grove and can be still admired today while his illustrations adorn Scott's books. Even though both types of work are beautiful and show skill, Harry was not able to support himself and Daisy from this work and the smallholding was not successful enough to help. Young enough to enlist when the War came, Harry joined the army and the family finally left Oak Grove for good in 1919 (Wardle and Quayle 50).

St. George's Farm 1907–1911, 1911–1936 (Ruskin Land)

> . . . the little red house up to which a piece of steep clear land seemed to rise out of the forest and trees covered with white blossom gave me a sudden feeling of a coral islet rising out of a sea of trees. (Scott, *Beloved* 172)

Frederic and Ada Watson, Companions from 1908, were also of the Liverpool Ruskin Society circle and, inspired by the ideals of rural life, left their ironmonger's shop in the city. Mr. and Mrs. Brown in *Beloved*, the Watsons were Guild tenants proper—they did not buy their own land, but moved into a cottage built on the land offered by Baker back in 1871. The cottage that Baker denied Graham was finally constructed by the Guild in 1906-7 and Wardle and Quayle quote Baker as reporting to the Guild in 1908 that it had been rented to a "local tenant" (54). The tenant was "cultivating his land and . . . [was] satisfied with his holding" except for trouble with the road to the farm which tended to become muddy and impassable

in the winter (MR 1908, SA GSG3). [29] The identity of that tenant had not been known, but after research in the Worcester Archives I can now reveal him to have been one Edward Taylor and the cottage at that time to have been known as "Ruskins" (sic)—probably short for the description "Ruskin's house" (WA 53 26/474B). Taylor seemed to have been there only for about a year as the Electoral Register for 1911 has no entry for the house at all. Mr. Watson appears on the register as living in "The Ruskins" (sic) in 1913, although Wardle and Quayle speculate that the family moved in earlier than that (WA 56 28/520; Wardle and Quayle 54).

Mr. and Mrs. Watson moved to Bewdley with their young children and started a poultry and fruit farm, taking advantage of the land that had been cleared and so lovingly planted with an orchard by Graham thirty years earlier. The land and orchard must have been neglected and in poor state since Graham's departure as Scott highlights the Watson's success in her letter to Master Fairfax-Cholmeley: "I should like you to know," she writes in 1926, "that [St. George's] was almost a desert except for a [grove?] of cherry trees planted during Ruskin's Mastership." According to her, the farm was a "most hopeless piece of land" and the Watsons "had a hard struggle and have spent their own capital on the work. The Guild has acted as a helpful landlord and I believe the place is worth now many times the original value" thus vindicating "Ruskin's idea of . . . bringing waste land into cultivation" (SA GSG/CB/66). We have to rely on Scott to speak for the Watsons as Quayle and Wardle claim they left "no letters or diaries to record their thoughts and daily life" as they were not literary folk (56).[30] Old photographs and occasional Guild correspondence on the matter tell us that they managed to support themselves from the farm and stayed on as Guild tenants until 1936, taking their

[29] The road gave trouble to all subsequent tenants as well, e.g. in 1927 the Guild felt compelled to return Mr. Watson his rent for the year as the Master decided that the Guild had not fulfilled its duty as landlord with regards to the state of the road and thus prevented the Watsons from selling their stock (MR 1926-7, SA GSG3).

[30] As if to contradict this claim, a publication exists called *Literary Associations of Liverpool* written by one Frederick Watson (1928). Perhaps it is only a coincidental sharing of names, but if so, then it is strange that such a booklet should be kept among Bewdley-related items in the private archive of the late Peter Wardle, descendant of William and Bernard Wardle, both of whom would have known the Watsons. I have not been able to find an explanation for that yet.

produce to the Kidderminster market through the muddy road from the farm. Apparently, there were "from hundreds to a thousand eggs weekly to add to the home-grown food of the country" (Scott 1922 letter, SA GSG24/2 5). The Watsons' decision to teach their sons farming at home and at "an Agricultural College" seems Ruskinian too and in it the Watsons received financial support from Guild Companions Mr. and Mrs. Stapledon (SA GSG24/2 5). Not resident in Bewdley, the Stapeldons, especially Scott's cousin Emmeline, were Ruskin Land Companions by proxy, through their financial involvement in Guild work in the town. Apart from helping out the Watsons in financing the education of their children, Mrs. Stapledon, together with Scott, offered the Guild land in the Forest for labourers' cottages that, in the end, were never built (Wardle and Quayle 43); the two women also loaned money to a local man to buy a smallholding for himself. "He got his farm and the money was nearly all repaid in a year's time. After the [Great] war he was able to sell the place for nearly three times the price he gave for it, and to buy a larger farm in the neighbourhood, more suitable for his family. So that indirectly by the presence of the Guild, there are five good stock country boys saved for England," evaluated this deed Scott (1922 letter, SA GSG24/2 7).

In 1936 Fred Watson fell ill and the family decided that it was time the elderly couple moved somewhere less remote. Writing to the Master T.E. Harvey of his father's illness, William Watson acknowledged that it was a difficult decision to leave the Farm but a necessary one: "I am sure that from your knowledge of my Father and Mother you will understand just what this step means to them" (SA GSG/AF/138 1). They had given twenty-five years of their life to their belief in Ruskin's teaching and, in the opinion of Wardle and Quayle, were just the kind of Guild Retainers Ruskin had hoped for: "good folk, honest, capable and homely—the very mirror of Ruskin's vision of a well-tilled corner of England" (56). The Guild hoped that the Watsons' successor to St. George's Farm will "follow in their steps" especially as he was Ada Watson's nephew (MR 1935-36, SA GSG3 5). In 1936 negotiations began over the takeover of St. George's Farm and construction of a house for an additional family.

Uncllys Farm 1914–1929, 1930–1947 (Ruskin Land)

The Quayles were the last Liverpool family to move to Bewdley, but the only ones to settle there permanently. Never Guild tenants, but always very involved in Guild affairs, both in and outside Bewdley, they moved to Uncllys Farm in 1914 to leave in 1929 and move to their own, neighbouring farm, Bowcastle. The reason for their move to the Wyre seems to have been twofold: they had been told that country life would be beneficial to the health of their eldest son Cuthbert and many of their Mulberry Cottage friends had already tried living in the area (Wardle and Quayle 59). Bewdley then seemed a good spot for the family of a retired businessman and a Ruskinian to settle in. The farm they chose was in a clearing neighbouring St. George's Farm and not far at all from St. John's Lane through the Forest. In 1914 it was in private hands and known as "Uncle's" or "Uncless." The land used to belong to George Baker and in 1914 was owned by Mr. Adam who bought the estate after Baker's death; to accommodate the five Quayles, the cottage was extended and the Quayles renamed in "Uncllys" (Wardle and Quayle 60). The Quayles' greatest friends in the Forest were their closest neighbours, the Watsons with whom they shared the remoteness from the town. Although the head of the family, Charles Clucas Quayle, had been retired when the family moved to Uncllys, it seems that he needed to supplement his pension from the holding. Cedric Quayle, the grandson of Charles Clucas, judges the life at the farm was "hard," with no electricity or running water and an orchard, poultry and cattle to look after (Wardle and Quayle 61). Cedric Quayle's uncle Cuthbert, whose health must have improved after the move to the country, turned out to be a skilled farmer. In Scott's 1922 account of him, Cuthbert is "an enthusiastic small farmer and country man, A fine high-minded man, devoted to his work, and 'dealing perfectly' with those with whom he deals in the sale of [produce]. He [too] pays more than the district rate of wages and [stands] up to the Farmers' Union" (1922 letter, SA GSG24/2 5). It seems that Cuthbert exhibited some Ruskinian qualities: attentiveness to work, which resulted in a significant increase in food production ("doubled or quadrupled" writes Scott),[31] and fairness in business dealings with labourers and customers alike. He

[31] Scott never provided any figures to justify her claims that the Harleys, Watsons and Quayles significantly increased the value of their land and made a success of their holdings. However, as the

seems to have also been shy or very modest as Scott suggests to the Master: "I think he would like to be a Guild Companion . . ., if he could be useful in regard to the land" (SA GSG24/2 5). In 1929 the Quayles left Uncllys for their own, bigger, farm for Cuthbert to run—Bowcastle.

After the Quayles moved out, Uncllys, together with 125 acres of surrounding woodland, was bought by the Guild in a leap of faith in the potential of Ruskin Land. The Master behind the project, Hugh Fairfax-Cholmeley, wanted to make Bewdley "the centre for [the Guild's] practical work in agricultural life" as he announced in his Master's Report (MR) 1926-27 (SA GSG3 5). In private correspondence he expressed a belief that the purchase would be "strictly following the original intention of our founders" (19 Nov. 1926 letter, SA GSG/CB/66). Buying Uncllys would also mean that the Guild could finally build a better road to St. George's Farm for without the road, the entire settlement will have had to be abandoned. In 1927, the Master tried using Scott's *Beloved* as propaganda: "[the novel] should help those with a literary taste to appreciate the spirit of Guild life in the Forest," he claimed in the same Master's Report (SA GSG3 5). For those Companions who were still doubtful, Fairfax-Cholmeley offered a combination of sound financial arguments and Ruskinian logic: Uncllys could be bought with money received from the sale of Totley (Sheffield); the Guild had been collecting interest on its bank stock; Ruskin's main aim was to buy land and he disliked interest. Ergo, buying Uncllys "coincides literally with the primary intentions of our Founder" (SA GSG3 5).[32] An additional objective was to save this part of the Forest from being planted with conifers, a quick-growing source of wood. This post-

families managed to live on the farms for many years, perhaps Scott's "I think" and "I believe" in place of data can be forgiven and taken to mean that they did well—on the whole. Guild correspondence from the period shows that the Watsons had some very lean years and had their rent reduced as a result. F. Watson wrote to the Secretary, Alexander Farquhason, in November 1932: "there has been no fruit . . ., had it not been for the Poultry, we should have been forced to close down" (SA GSG/AF/103). Cedric Quayle is of the opinion that living completely off the land in the Forest was never possible and many of the Guild's tenants had jobs in Kidderminster's carpet factories that helped them survive (Quayle. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018).

[32] What was not Ruskin's intention was allowing hunting, shooting and riding for sport on his lands, but perhaps Farirfax-Cholmely decided to overlook that when signing the sale contract with such stipulations in favour of Mr. Butcher, the seller (SA GSG/AF/62).

World War I plan of the Forestry Commission did not appeal to the Guild who saw it as "a threat to preserving the traditions and crafts of the forest" (wall text for *Beautiful*). The purchase was effected and the farm conveyed to the Guild in 1930. As the owner, the Guild fell in with the local practice of coppicing and thinning the woodland and Uncllys timber brought in satisfactory sums of money every year[33] while the farm was rented out to non-Companions with Cuthbert Quayle supervising the Guild's "practical work on the Bewdley property" (MR 1929-30, SA GSG3 5). Entrusting Ruskin Land to the care of local Companions (for years men from the Quayle family) was a move that would prevent the Guild from becoming the absentee landlords despised by Ruskin (e.g. 27.176). In the search for a tenant enigmatically described as "of the type that the Guild desires to encourage" (MR 1931-32, SA GSG3 9), Uncllys was rented three times in that period. A Mr. Morris and son took it on first, but Mr. Morris the father was forced to move out after his son's death; a Mr. Price was the second tenant and initially lived at Uncllys rent-free in recognition that "some time will be required to bring the Farm back into good condition" (MR 1932-33, SA GSG3 4). This proved more difficult than expected and after two years of struggles, the Prices left Uncllys to Mr. Mountford "who [had] for some years been tenant of a more isolated smallholding in the neighbourhood and has had experience with pigs and poultry," reported the Master in 1935 (MR 1934-35, SA GSG3 4). George Mountford remained at Uncllys until 1947.

Harold Bell

One more person settled in Bewdley through the influence of local Guild Companions. The often quoted here September 1922 letter from Edith Hope Scott to Mr. Luxmoore mentions another member of her family who decided to move to the area after a visit to Atholgarth. Her *Autobiography* provides what the letter does not—a name. The settler is revealed as one Harold Bell, a cousin of her brother-in-law Theodore Wardleworth (164). Bell has not previously been mentioned as part of the Bewdley group and it does not seem he was a Companion of the Guild, but I believe his story merits him a place in the little Bewdley circle of

[33] E.g. £84 in 1930 which would have been over £3,800 in 2019 (MR 1929-30, SA GSG3 5; Nat. Archives).

family, friends and neighbours. This is because he came to live there through "the cumulative influence of the Guild on the neighbourhood" and also because of what he was and how he lived. Scott writes that "he was a townsman with a love and . . . almost a genius for farming" who had been looking for a farm to settle on. While staying at Atholgarth, he made the acquaintance of Thomas Harley who was able to find him a farm "a few miles off." The place was neglected, but Bell made a success of it and also became very locally involved in protecting the interests of farmers and agricultural labourers: he was "a practical businessman [who] requires his work to be done, and has no money to spare,—but his sense of justice is keenly alive, for his workmen as well as for himself." To this end he became a chairman of the local Farmers' Union (Scott 1922 letter, SA GSG24/2 6). Electoral registers for Bewdley North Division show that there were Bells in St. John's Lane, and a deed to Atholgarth held in the Guild solicitor's office contains a map on which a "Mr. Bell" owns three cottages and land between Scott's house and St. John's Cottage (BL SPR.Mic.P.658/BL.W.110; Conveyance 23 Sept. 1910). But as Bell might be a popular name and Scott writes that the farm was "a few miles off," then perhaps it was a different family who moved in next to Atholgarth.

Episode 3: 1937-1955 Wartime Farms

Deaths or departures from Bewdley of dedicated Companions ended the era of visible dominance of this estate in Guild affairs. This dominance was enhanced by Edith Hope Scott's prolific writing which came to a stop with her death in 1936. The departure of Watsons in the same year and, in 1942, the death of Margaret Harley, the first of the Liverpudlians to come to Bewdley, severed the strong connection between that city and the Wyre Forest. Addresses and details in Companions' letters show that surviving members and the descendants of the Mulberry Cottage group still used Scott's cottage Atholgarth, but without her reporting on the lives of her friends and family in St. John's Lane, information about this part of the Bewdley estate becomes scarce. There is however enough on Guild-owned St. George's and Uncllys Farms to reconstruct the life of Ruskin Land.

After the purchase of Uncllys, the Guild owned 150 acres in the Wyre Forest and had tenants on both smallholdings. From this followed managerial

responsibility recorded in correspondence, financial documents, etc. kept in the Sheffield Archives. These archival sources are of a significantly less personal nature and ready-made narrative quality than Scott's writing. Gone is the sense of comradeship and community there given by Scott; whether anything like that existed is difficult to determine from the Guild papers available. Companions were still present in the neighbourhood—the Quayles had settled permanently on a neighbouring farm and, during World War II, the aging Mrs. Harley was sharing Atholgarth with the Wardle family, but we have no indication of the strength of the community and how Guild's tenants fit into it. Guild correspondence with tenants is semi-official and so offers only the facts, not the story behind them. Private opinions of life with the Guild as landlord are shrouded from our eyes and more research is needed to bring them to light. For example, we do not hear Ruskin Williams's side of the sad story of his struggles at St. George's Farm, nor George Mountford's at Uncllys.

In the background for the changes at Bewdley were also changes in the Guild and, more importantly, dramatic events on the wider political scene. The period discussed here saw four Masters: Thomas Edmund Harvey had to guide the Guild through World War II and the difficult post-war years; Alexander Farquhason, after a long service as the Guild's Secretary, took over Mastership for three years; during the short struggle to find his successor, D. Bernard Wardle, the Guild's Secretary and Mulberry Cottage child acted as Master; finally, Herbert Arthur Hodges took over in 1954 for the next twenty years. The most significant event of that period was World War II, the impact of which was felt in the British countryside until the 1950s. Would John Ruskin, who was strongly opposed to wars, appreciate the irony of World War II bringing about the nationwide return to self-sufficiency he so desired? The Government's acute awareness of being dependent on land for survival meant a widespread takeover of decision-making in the countryside. In his essay *Return to Ruskin Land*, Neil Sinden wrote that "not much is known about what happened here during the Second World War" (Sinden 177). Intrigued, I took up this challenge and, in Sheffield and National Archives, found material which offered a glimpse into Ruskin Land at War. What I found and discuss below shows that, unsurprisingly, the War took matters in the Wyre largely out of the Guild's

hands. This seems to have been a matter for concern; Master Thomas Harvey worried in his 1940-41 Report: “In accordance with the War Agricultural Committee, land which has been used for many years as orchard, pasture or meadow land has been ploughed up and cropped, both at Uncllys and at St. George’s. This has doubtless been of immediate service in view of the needs of the country, but unless care be taken it may not prove of permanent advantage to our farms” (SA GSG3 4). “Not of permanent advantage” was a very real possibility as underperforming farms were taken away from farmers by the authorities and farmers conscripted. As we shall see, some of the Guild’s tenants came very close to this fate.

St. George’s Farm and Bungalow, Uncllys Farm (Ruskin Land)

“[Miss Scott] and Mrs. Stapledon were two of the most practical-minded members of the Guild and we will miss them both very much indeed,” wrote the prospective tenant of St. George’s Farm, G.S. Williams, in 1936. It is unclear how Williams formed his opinion. It may have been that he met the two women while visiting his relative Ada Watson in the Wyre Forest. There is no record of any such visit, but Williams’s letters project a sensible man who would have visited the farm he wanted to take on before giving up his holding in Southampton. Master’s Reports from 1936 and 1937 record that an R. Williams moved in in January 1937 and expresses hope that he would “prove in every way a worthy successor” to the Watsons (SA GSG3 4); they also inform Companions that R. Williams’s father asked to be allowed to live on Guild land to be closer to his son. R. Williams was G.S. Williams’s son Ruskin, no doubt named in an homage to John Ruskin, perhaps through the influence of Mrs. Watson. The young man took over their farm and farm machinery: the Watsons’ rapid removal back to Liverpool meant the farm was being left with all its equipment and stock. Ruskin Williams, aided by a loan from the Guild, could purchase this, so-called, dead stock and begin his farming enterprise at St. George’s. Hopeful about his farm, especially the poultry, he was settling down while Mr. Williams senior was negotiating the building of an extra cottage on Guild land (24 June 1937 letter, SA GSG/AF/5). Although the negotiations started in 1936, the cottage—or Bungalow as it became known—was

not built until late 1938. The Guild was keen to be seen as a good landlord: “Mr. Watson and Mr. Quayle would assure you [the Guild] has never taken the line of quibbling nor of trying to get the last farthing in its arrangements with its tenants,” wrote Harvey to Williams senior, promising to fix the road and charge less for rents than the going rate in the area (27 Jan. 1937 letter, SA GSG/AF/5). However, it seems the Guild was not adequately quick in fulfilling its landlord’s duty to provide George Williams with a roof over his head and negotiations dragged on. The agreement was that Williams the elder would build the house using materials provided by the Guild and then lease the land and the building at nominal rents for a fixed period. The cottage then would become Guild property. The Guild’s approval was needed for the design—no to asbestos but yes to wood tiles as “lighter and more pleasing to the eye” and “more in keeping with the surroundings” (SA GSG/AF/5)—and the district authority’s for the location. This was rejected as too invasive in the Forest and a plot just off the road between Uncllys and St. George’s Farm was approved instead. George Williams had no choice but to agree to the change, but commented that the new plot was “quite alright for keeping poultry on—but perhaps not quite large enough or [of] good enough soil to ensure its becoming a profitable small holding” (sic) (18 Feb. 1938 letter, SA GSG/AF/5). Williams was in a difficult position: he had sold his farm in Southampton and was living with his son with no income of his own. What had been referred to in perhaps one line in Master’s Reports for these years, was quickly becoming a desperate situation for the elder Williamses. At the end of March 1938, George Williams wrote of his disappointment not to have heard from the Master while “several matters [were] giving us a measure of anxiety”: furniture having been in storage for six months by then instead of few weeks, and, more importantly, the inability to buy young stock. Young stock was “needed to replace those I had to sell before coming here, on which I have to depend for our living” (March 1938 letter, SA GSG/AF/5). It is not clear how the matter of the stock was resolved as letters show that the Bungalow was finally completed and the Williamses moved in in the winter of 1938. Their lease was 15 years and relations, despite the miscommunication over the tenancy, seemed cordial—Mr. Williams senior sent Bewdley cherries to the Guild office and Mr. and Mrs. Harvey left a Christmas gift on the Williams’s

doorstep (SA GSG/AF/37). Mr. and Mrs. Williams stayed in the Bungalow until 1958 and seemed to be doing much better than the younger Williamses at St. George's Farm.

Despite initial optimism, Ruskin Williams soon began to struggle. Since none of his own letters are available in the archives, it is through Guild reports, internal correspondence, his father's letters and World War II farm surveys that we learn of the younger Williams's plight. George Williams seems to have occasionally helped out with the rent on St. George's and sometimes writes about his son's woes: "I am sorry Ruskin has not kept a very careful account of the Receipts & Expenses on the farm during his tenancy as he would then have been in a position to show just how far the place has come short of providing anything like a decent living for them all" (SA GSG/AF/37). The Guild sympathised and tried to be understanding, but was also pragmatic and wanted the money it was due. When the younger Williamses announced they had been given a Council house and were moving out, Cuthbert Quayle advised the Guild to collect arrears as Ruskin was unlikely to "find it so easy to catch up" (6 June 1954 letter, SA GSG2).

At Uncllys Farm, George Mountford suffered a series of difficult years, despite initially appearing "to be doing good work" (MR 1935-36, GSG3). His departure from Uncllys in 1947 was due to a combination of wartime struggles and personal problems. In June 1943 Guild Secretary A. Farquhason warned the Master that a "very unfortunate state of affairs seems to have arisen at Uncllys. . . . I fear that, if Mountford brings the matter to court, a good deal of dirty linen may be washed in public" (28 June 1943 letter, SA GSG/AF/138). Letters with explanation of the problem are missing from the correspondence kept in Sheffield and so is any record of the meeting between the Master and Farquhason that the latter's letter anticipates. Missing letters and avoidance of putting things in writing invite speculation as to the cause of this "unfortunate state of affairs." Tantalising as it may sound, it most likely referred to Mountford's trouble with his lodgers and estrangement from his mother rather than trouble between him and the Guild. This would follow from a March 1943 letter from Farquhason to the Master reporting Mountford's anxiety over his health, crops and family: "Mountford seemed

depressed and worried. He has had a touch of influenza . . .. His mother is still in furnished lodgings and . . . he doubts if she would ever be happy unless she were living on a farm. We inferred, however, that he is quite unwilling to offer her a home again. His nephew is nearing military age and will be called up shortly. This means that the boy could no longer help at Uncllys in any case. Mountford can get no labour" (March 1943 letter, SA GSG/AF/138). It is possible that poor crops and ensuing financial difficulties meant that Mountford could not afford the labour he needed, not that there was none—women labourers took over from men as farm hands and would have been available if required. Many farms in the Wyre Forest were helped by these Land Girls; some were working just next door, at Bowcastle Farm (*Nature of Wyre* CD2, "Land Army" 00:01:10-16).

Mr. J.C. Lewis, "an experienced local fruit farmer," eventually replaced Mountford at Uncllys and the Master hoped that this change would cause Uncllys to be "once again a family farm, as it should be" (MR 1947-48, SA GSG3 5). This hope seems to have been fulfilled as the Lewis family remained at Uncllys until the 1980s.

Like all farms in the United Kingdom, also those at Ruskin Land did not escape the wartime demand for increased food production and came under close scrutiny from the Ministries of Food and Agriculture. Both George Mountford and Ruskin Williams were affected by this. They were forced to grow extra crops to help the war effort and would have lived under threat of being conscripted and having the farms taken over if not performing up to the authorities' standards. War Agricultural Committees (War AGs) were formed in every UK county and had the right to tell farmers to plough up more land and plant food crops wherever available, regardless of the quality of their soils. Uncllys and St. George's, farms created by clearing forest plots, are not on fertile soil and at St. George's the ground is additionally waterlogged. Never favourable, such circumstances were even less so during World War II and may be the reason why the tenants struggled to satisfy the War AG's representatives. To fulfil his obligations towards the war effort, in 1943, George Mountford intended "to keep the ground below the house at Uncllys and the four acre cherry orchard under cultivation, growing cabbage

rather than potatoes," reported A. Farquharson in a March 1943 letter to the Master (SA GSG/AF/138). Thanks to Farquharson, a detailed account of the situation also at St. George's Farm exists—invaluable in gaining an understanding of what Guild land was like during the War. It seems that Ruskin Williams did not want to join the army but, even as a Conscientious Objector, faced "being put to non-combatant service" as the farm had not been up to the War AG's standards. Farquharson was relieved to report that things had finally changed for the better:

> . . . we must put this down to the firm line at last taken by the War Agricultural Committee, who have put the farm in Class C., which means that the tenant must follow their instructions in every respect or lose his exemption from war service. Fruit growing does not itself exempt the farmer: the farm must produce urgently required food. Williams has ploughed the whole of the upper part of the farm and has sown oats. Quayle did the work with his tractor. Even this crop would not make Williams exempt: the Agricultural Organiser, therefore, has suggested that he should grow potatoes on the lowest part of the farm below the orchards and he and his father are now busy preparing this ground by hand. They are also getting rid of brambles and bracken, clearing away rubbish and giving the whole place an appearance of being cared for. The County Agricultural expert will come shortly to advise on the fruit trees." (SA GSG/AF/138)

"C" was the lowest grade a farm could get in the National Farm Survey of 1941 and a sure way of having one's farm claimed by the authorities if not improved. Ruskin Williams managed to avoid this fate by following the War AG's recommendations on the effective use of his land. Due to the War AG's interference, the Guild's land became more productive than ever before. This may have been achieved at the cost of introducing chemical fertilizers to the farms, something John Ruskin did not approve of, but that was being forced by the government to increase yields. No accounts, Guild or other, are readily available on whether or not this was done, but a letter exchange exists on the need to rejuvenate the soil. Two months before her death, Margaret Harley was concerned about the yields at Ruskin Land and suggested "ploughing in of English white clover where the ground has lost its fertility" (28 Jan. 1942 letter, SA GSG/AF/138). The matter was serious enough for

the Guild to consult the War AG, but it is not known whether white clover was eventually used.

Many of the Guild documents kept in Sheffield show that life at Ruskin Land went on even or perhaps in spite of, the extreme wartime conditions. Almost two decades earlier, Edith Hope Scott called it the "everydayness" of war:

> . . . we have had to take life in its everydayness, and not hold our breath for news as we began by doing. We do our usual work, and garden, and see each other and even laugh and joke, and every morning as we come down we open the paper with a jerk at the heart. Then we knit socks and sew shirts and get up meetings to collect money, and it only seems strange when one goes alone through the wood and a sudden stillness catches hold of one, and one says "war" like a sudden trumpet in one's heart. (*Beloved* 53-54)

The experience may have been much the same during World War II. At the farms, a water pipe was put in and a meter needed replacing; timber sales fluctuated; Boy Scouts camped and deer needed to be kept out on the orders of the War AG (SA GSG/AF/62; MR 1940-42, GSG3). The two last events prompted Ruskinian musings from the Guild's Master, T.E. Harvey, who hoped that the deer could be eliminated in a humane way as more in keeping with Ruskin's spirit, and that Scouts' experience of nature would enrich their lives. The Boy Scouts were allowed to set up their camps on the Guild land for the first time in 1939 and in Harvey's opinion expressed in Master's Reports 1938-42, it was a good use of the Guild land. It provided "opportunities to the lads of Bewdley to live for a little while in the beautiful Wyre Forest and to learn to love the life of the woods" and "enjoy woodland life, [observe] wild creatures, trees and plants" (SA GSG3).

It seems that the Guild tried to stay positive throughout the war and see it as a chance to bring out its original mission. In the Master's Report for 1938-39, Harvey, echoing the national propaganda, urged the Companions to "carry on" despite difficulties. "It is more difficult at such a time and in such conditions to be faithful to the great principles which inspire the creed that Ruskin wrote for his companions, but those principles are more than ever needed if we are to do our part in working for and helping to bring to birth that better world of the future," he

wrote (SA GSG3 3). When the bombings of UK cities began and many children were sent to the countryside for protection, the Master saw it as a chance for them to be inspired by country lives. He hoped that "many of those children who have lived a wholly urban existence, cut off from all contact with the life of the fields and the countryside, may awake [sic] to new interests in the rural surroundings in which they are now living and some at least may later seek their livelihood in wholesome country occupations" (SA GSG3 4). It seems that the Guild farms did not have a chance to provide children with such inspiration as no young people are reported as having moved in with the tenants. Perhaps forest farms were not considered safe as the Wyre was bombed during World War II,[34] but there were evacuees in town (*Nature of Wyre* CD1, "History" 00:04:46-05:45; 00:06:30-08:02). Post-war Master's Reports and available correspondence are laconic on Bewdley, or on what the Guild planned to do with its properties other than manage them at an ad hoc basis: try to sell timber and hope the tenants would manage and if not, find new ones (SA GSG3). Gone were declarations of the existence of a special community or commendation of comradeship from the Liverpool Ruskin Society's times.

Episode 4: 1958-1978 Peace

The difficult War and post-War years at Ruskin Land were followed by a period of calm. The twenty years spanning this next episode saw the settling in of new tenants in all three Ruskin Land cottages. They were all still in residence in 1978 and this cut off year for the episode is also the year when a large portion of Guild land in the Wyre Forest was declared a nature reserve, the most straightforwardly environmental event in the history of the Guild settlement up to then. Briefly discussed here, the lease to Nature Conservancy Council is given more prominence in Chapter 3. For the Guild, the years 1958-78 meant financial struggles, legal and organisational changes—the Guild became a charity—and, towards the end of the period, a financial recovery which allowed funding of the much needed repairs of the Bewdley properties and brief involvement with the town. On a national scale,

[34] Claim the older residents (*Nature of Wyre* CD1). Bombs did fall on nearby Kidderminster, so it is possible that German bombers would have attempted to bomb the railway lines through the Forest if they were that close to Bewdley (BBC).

the 1960s and 70s brought social and economic changes, among them the construction of motorways in Britain and an increase in car ownership. These brought about public worries about increasing pollution and a wider interest in greener living, including a desire to eat good quality, organically farmed, produce—as promoted, and from 1973 certified, by the Soil Association (Soil Assoc.). The desire for a simple, more self-sufficient life, as well as a renewed interest in the countryside and country leisure activities entered mainstream politics when the People Party, the first Green political party in Europe, published its manifesto on sustainability and ecology. Green interests were especially prevalent among the educated middle-classes in an echo of the "pastoral impulse" of Victorians and Edwardians (Marsh 4). In the Wyre Forest, this was visible in the grassroots movement to protect the area culminating in the establishment of the Wyre Forest Society in 1974. As it was chaired by Mr. Stephen Quayle, Companion Cedric Quayle's father, the Guild was kept up to date with its activities in the area.

At Uncllys, Jack Lewis had been in residence since 1948 and seemed to have succeed in bringing the farm "into thoroughly good shape" (MR 1948-49, SA GSG3 5); he had been paying his rent regularly and Guild papers do not mention any trouble. Only the ageing farmhouse could potentially bring some, but the Guild could not afford a survey until the late 1970s. Funds were also inadequate to cover the proper repair or laying in of a new water pipe and this seemed to be causing much anxiety (SA GSG3). When the pipe was finally replaced, it was accompanied by a telephone line into the forest—although Mr. Lewis did not choose to have this modern convenience installed (SA GSG2). Cedric Quayle, who took over representing the Guild at Ruskin Land from his uncle Cuthbert in 1969, insisted the telephone cable be put underground to preserve the beauty of the landscape. He wrote in 1977: "it seems a pity to spoil the ship for a ha'p'worth of Post Office tar" (17 Aug. 1976 letter, SA GSG2).

In Cedric Quayle's uncle Cuthbert's 1955 estimate, Ruskin Williams and family left St. George's "terribly neglected" after an inadequate income of £1/week. The new tenants, a Mr. and Mrs. Bishop, were "hard workers, . . . fond of the country" and whom he could not "imagine more suitable applicants" (13 June 1955,

SA GSG2). Adjustments were made to make the Bishops comfortable at the farm with three young children: a bathroom was installed and the family were planning to "put in a small engine & generating set for lighting, as, although fond of country life, they would not want it to be *too* simple" (italics original, SA GSG2). The Bishops also did away with the orchard painstakingly planted by Graham but now unprofitable, and established a poultry farm at St. George's. They seemed happy with their life in the Forest and stayed there until 2014. However, they could not support themselves entirely from the smallholding: Jack Bishop let out part of the farm to a recycling business of disputable environmental credentials and worked in one of the Kidderminster carpet factories both before and during his tenancy at St. George's (Sinden 177).

After the departure of his son from St. George's Farm, Mr. Williams senior stayed on in the Bungalow for three more years before finally moving to a Council house in Bewdley. A Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths are reported to have moved in by 1959. They brought with them electricity: the Guild had put in "new gates and a cedar-wood outhouse for the tenant's electric plant" informed Companions the Master's Report 1954-73 (SA GSG3 2). The Griffiths would stay on as Bungalow tenants until 2011.

Episode 5: 1980s-2000s Green Beginnings

Environmental interest in the Guild's properties in the Wyre Forest, budding in the previous episode, continues in this one. In 1981, the Guild signed a 21-year Nature Reserve agreement with English Nature (now Natural England). This was extended for a further 7 years in 1996 to be followed by another 21-year lease of the area as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The farms, especially Uncllys, have also entered into Stewardship Agreements with the UK government, more on which in the next chapter. As evident from the tenancy applications for Uncllys, the Guild seemed to be putting more emphasis on the recruitment of tenants sympathetic to the special circumstances of the area. Mr. J.C. Lewis stayed on as tenant there until 1981 after which year the tenancy was taken over by another, unrelated to the first Lewises, couple: John and Gillian Lewis. Personal problems and eventual departure of her husband forced Mrs. Lewis to abandon the farm with rent in arrears and in

1995, the Guild found itself looking for new tenants. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers and applicants had to produce references. Judging by the applications received, it is clear that the Guild expected prospective tenants to provide farming and environmental credentials. Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths of the Bungalow, who were one of the applicants, hoped their son Jim would be able to do cattle farming there. They saw themselves as good candidates as forests were supposed to be in their blood: Mr. Griffiths the elder had been nursery manager and both their grandparents had worked in "these woods" (n. d. letter Griffiths to Quayle, in the possession of J. Iles). The Guild eventually chose a Mr. and Mrs. Meehan, who, in the opinion of their referees, have always had a dream of living in the country and had "a high regard for their environment" (23 Oct. 1995 letter, in the possession of J. Iles). The reality of living on the woodland smallholding turned out to be harsh and the Meehans soon began to struggle. In 1997, the Guild had to consider its options. By then Guild Director, Cedric Quayle was much more understanding and sympathetic towards the Meehans' plight than Anthony Page, Guild Director of Properties. Quayle felt that it was "not in the spirit of the Guild to be harsh to tenants," although some action had to be taken on the unpaid rent. Unburdened by personal knowledge of the tenants, Page was disinclined to treat them leniently and judged the situation only on the Meehans' "previous [poor] financial performance" (Aug. 1997 letters, in the possession of J. Iles). Despite ongoing problems, the family remained Uncllys tenants until 2004.

In 2004, Uncllys was up for let again and this time John and Linda Iles, who in 1995 were not yet in a position to apply, put in their application. Resident in Bewdley for 20 years, they loved the area and knew the Forest well. They had always wanted to do practical conservation work on their own piece of land and renting Uncllys was more attainable than a purchase of anything of their own. The Guild accepted them as tenants based on their considerable experience and a comprehensive application thoughtfully evaluating the farm's environmental potential. I return to Ruskin Land in the times of the Iles in Chapter 3.

At the Bungalow, Barbara and Rex Griffiths had been tenants since 1956 and in 2004 were still enjoying "living in this lovly [sic] corner of God's earth" (15 Oct. 2004 letter, in the possession of J. Iles). The Bungalow had been built in the late

1930s and it was quickly becoming evident that action was needed for it to remain habitable. The Griffiths paid a very low rent and did not seem to require much from their house, but they were elderly and unwell. Considering the cost of potential repairs, the Guild briefly contemplated selling the Bungalow but the charity's Board of Directors opposed the motion and the Bungalow is still a part of Ruskin Land. The cottage's tenancy passed briefly on to the Griffiths' son, but due to some problems of a personal nature, by 2011 the Guild was keen for him to leave. After the younger Mr. Griffiths's eventual departure, the Bungalow was properly refurbished and briefly became home to Ruskin Land's new manager and then a young family of non-Companions who have been there since.

At St. George's Farm things were steady: Mr. and Mrs. Bishop had been in residence since 1956 and by the time of Mr. Bishop's death in 2014, had become the Guild's oldest tenants.

As means of a summary of the various tenancies at and around Ruskin Land 1870s-2019, I offer a timeline, below (Fig. 3). [35]

[35] Current non-Guild occupiers of St. George's Farm and Bungalow are listed by initial only to protect their anonymity.

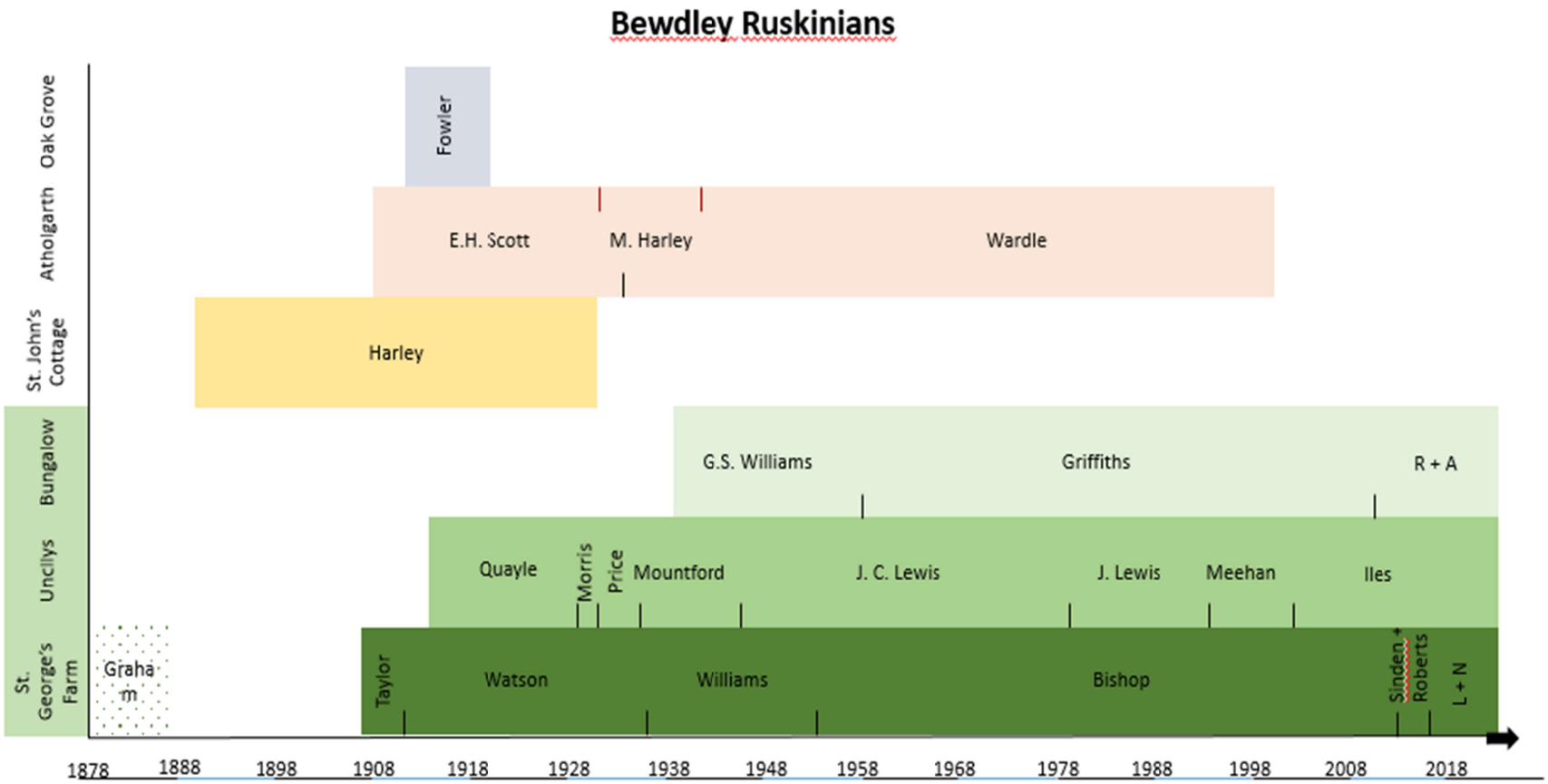

Fig. 3. Ruskinians in Bewdley: timeline of houses and occupants 1870s-2019 (Dominika Wielgopolan).

Despite unhappy and unpromising beginnings, Bewdley has survived as a Ruskinian settlement and is now the only location in which the Guild of St. George carries out its agricultural work. Ruskinian in spirit, it has differed from Ruskin's original vision. The chapter's aim was to tell the story of the Bewdley estate through that of its inhabitants—at Ruskin Land and in St. John's Lane—and their attempts at settler life from 1870s to 2000s. Not all of these attempts were informed by Ruskin's thought. The closest endeavour of living out Ruskin's principles was made first by William Graham and then the Liverpool Ruskin Society circle. Graham's attempt failed and it seems that the blame lies with both Ruskin and George Baker. Both men had considerably less influence over the second settlers the Liverpudlians, which allowed this group to successfully begin, and then sustain, a Ruskinian community in the Forest. When the Liverpudlians were moving to the Wyre between 1889 and 1914, Ruskin was no longer able to instruct them in their work. The Guild or succeeding Masters also had limited authority since members of the Liverpool Ruskin Society moved largely to their own land, not Guild property. There was much less of a class gap between them and Ruskin and Baker than between the two men and Graham. Finally, the Liverpudlians moved in pre-existing family and friendship groups, practically relocating the community they had formed in Liverpool, particularly at Wavertree, into Bewdley. Bizarrely, in favour of the group was also Ruskin's virtual silence and then eventual death: it encouraged, and then necessitated, horizontal communication between Companions rather than just the vertical from Ruskin to Companions communicated largely through *Fors Clavigera*. Ruskin's death also meant that there appeared a pressing need to (re)interpret his thought and the role of the Guild, and, throughout the years, its response to wider political and socio-economic circumstances in Britain. In the first decades after Ruskin's death—indeed perhaps through most of the 20th century—the Guild had very few projects and so Sheffield and Bewdley took prominence. In the Wyre, the Guild satisfied itself with purchasing some additional land and managing the properties on an ad hoc basis. Without a clear long-term plan in place, the settlement depended, perhaps even for survival, on thoughtful care of the Quayle family. Settled in the Forest in 1914, the Quayles have for years acted as advisors, overseers and general managers—later formally Directors—of Ruskin

Land on behalf of the Guild. The organisation did not seem very involved, environmentally or otherwise, in Bewdley until the 1970s. In the 1940s and 1950s this was perhaps due to the difficult political and resulting economic situation in Britain, which largely took matters out of the Guild's hands. Positive organisational and financial changes in the Guild in the 1970s—obtaining charity status and the sale of a valuable painting—coincided with the national trends of rising environmental awareness and appreciation of nature and countryside. This was reflected in part of the Guild woodland becoming Nature Reserves and SSI sites, but seems not to have penetrated deeply enough for the Guild to demand the polluting recycling business be removed from St. George's Farm. More noticeable efforts to return to a conscious environmental management of the properties began emerging in the mid-1990s and were enhanced—one would almost like to say, nailed into place[36]—by the tenancy of John and Linda Iles. The following chapter discusses the changes that the Iles made to Ruskin Land and the Guild's resulting new-found environmental consciousness and enthusiasm.

[36] From Ruskin's explanation of *Fors Clavigera*'s name where "Clavus" is a nail (27.28).

Chapter 3: On the Road to "Beautiful, Peaceful, and Fruitful"

A completely new phase in the life of Guild of St. George property in the Wyre Forest began in 2004 with the arrival of new tenants at Uncllys Farm. The family who had been living there before, despite enthusiasm and hopes, did not manage to realise their dreams of self-sufficiency. Now, due to poor health, they were moving out and so Guild Companion, Secretary, Director and Bewdley properties overseer Cedric Quayle decided to offer the tenancy to John and Linda Iles. When Quayle first offered it to them nine years before, the Ileses did not feel ready to take on the forest smallholding. This time, although initially hesitant, they applied for the tenancy of Uncllys and were successful. The Ileses' interest in and knowledge about the environment and an enthusiastic and coherent plan for Uncllys, including a biodiversity survey for the land, convinced the Guild to give them a long-term lease on the farm. Their application coincided with the Mastership of James Dearden and his Ruskin-inspired interest in and concern for wildflowers in England. Epitomised by the Master, the Guild's increasing interest in the well-being of English meadows and the Ileses' environmentally-sensitive plan for Uncllys, seemed to come together at just the right time and combined, began the process of complete change in the Guild's presence in Bewdley. This chapter picks up where the previous chapter left off and tells of the most recent period in the history of Ruskin Land, the years 2004 to 2019. It looks at the Ileses' beginnings at Uncllys and the expansion of their work, geographic and thematic, into the Wyre Community Land Trust (WCLT) and the Trust's development. The chapter also looks at the Guild's return to an active interest in rural economy and the organisation's growing relationship with the Wyre Forest culminating with the vision of it being "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" (27.96). Finally, the chapter discusses the adoption and living out of this motto by the WCLT at Ruskin Land with the accompanying successes and challenges of trying to apply Ruskin's thought in the twenty-first century.

The Coming of Mr. and Mrs. Iles

Just as things change for Edith Hope Scott's protagonists in *The Beloved* with "the coming of Mrs. Brown" to Bewdley (69), so they change for Ruskin Land with the arrival of John and Linda Iles and family at Uncllys Farm in 2004. Chapter 2 left the story of Ruskin Land and its tenants in the year 2000. By 2004, things had not changed much. St. George's Farm was still let to Jack Bishop who, although his relationship with the Guild was very good, preferred to keep to himself and carry on with his poultry farming. Retired from his work in Kidderminster, he supplemented his farming activities from sub-letting one of the Farm barns to an environmentally unfriendly rubbish processing business which in Guild documents was politely called "a small recycling business."[37] From an environmental point of view, the land and woodland had been neglected: St. George's woodland (5 acres) was part of one of the Wyre Forest Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), but this was an agreement primarily between the Guild and Natural England that Bishop seemed to simply be happy to sign as the land's tenant (3 March 1978 letter, SA GSG2); on the Farm itself, the William Graham orchard had been long gone and the grassland had been damaged by inorganic fertilisers. This does not seem to have been done through ill-will, but simply by "following the agricultural advice of the time" according to the biodiversity survey conducted at Ruskin Land in 2017 (Biodiv. Survey, "Part 2" 13). As a result, upon Jack Bishop's death in 2014, the soil samples taken by Natural England had high levels of phosphates and the meadows needed careful restoration (13). At the Bungalow, the Griffiths had been in residence since 1961 and "after 43 1/2 years [they] all continue[d] to enjoy living in this lovly [sic] corner of Gods earth [sic]" (18 Apr. 2004 letter, in the possession of J. Iles). The Griffiths did not seem to mind that the Bungalow was not ageing well, but for the Guild, the problem was serious enough to inspire a discussion on whether it would not be more prudent to demolish or sell the building upon Mrs. Griffiths' departure. This was not done and after extensive refurbishments, it found new tenants in 2012.

[37] For example, by John Iles in "Bewdley and the Rural Economy," a Guild Board discussion paper.

In 1995 Uncllys Farm had been let to a family who had dreamt of having a smallholding and whose plans for the Farm were big when they first moved in. Uncllys was a 12-acre farm comprised of woodland, pasture and a cherry orchard planted by the Quayle family back in the second and third decade of the twentieth century (Iles and Iles, "Ruskin"). In 2004, the orchard, wood pasture and part of the field above the farmhouse were included in the Wyre SSSI. The tenants had put the farm in a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, meaning that a certain amount of careful grazing and hay-cutting was going on for which the farm received a small payment from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This was not enough to adequately support the biodiversity of the land and the farm was also not productive enough for the family (Quayle. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). The inability to make the smallholding pay and increasing health problems of family members led to the decision to move out of Uncllys and opened the way to its takeover by John and Linda Iles.

Resident in Bewdley for many years, the Ileses, and their environmental credentials, were known to Guild Secretary Cedric Quayle. Although he received Uncllys tenancy applications from others, including the Griffiths from neighbouring St. George's Bungalow, he was certain that the Ileses were the right people to take on the farm (Quayle. Personal interview. 10 Dec. 2018). Both Ileses had practical experience in conservation, which boded well for an informed and successful running of the smallholding combined with John Iles's knowledge of funding routes, and relevant application processes (Iles. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). As with the previous tenants, a farm such as Uncllys had been a lifelong dream for the Ileses. In 2006, the couple wrote about themselves and Uncllys: "We are both very concerned about the ways in which mankind is rapidly bringing about a crisis through global warming by burning fossil fuels and wanted to adopt a less energy intensive lifestyle for ourselves. We saw an opportunity to be able to carry on with our present jobs and to gradually invest in the farm to make it possible to live there more sustainably for many years to come" (Iles and Iles, "Ruskin"). The Ileses' application for tenancy was informed by a biodiversity survey they had commissioned when considering taking on Uncllys. The survey recognised that, being part of the Wyre Prime Biodiversity Area, the woodland farm was a habitat to

some of the rare species of fauna and flora occurring across the Wyre. The survey also advised that the Farm needed consistently looking after in a way that would actively support these precious plants and animals. There were rare invertebrates in the neglected Uncllys orchard and the pastureland needed to be more biodiverse. DEFRA categorised the pastures at Uncllys as semi-improved grassland, "a transition category made up of grasslands which have been modified by artificial fertilisers, slurry, intensive grazing, herbicides or drainage, and consequently have a range of species which is less diverse and natural than unimproved grasslands" (Nature Conservancy Council 8). The Ileses' plan was to introduce a regime of grazing and replant the orchard. Their promise to the Guild was that "within 4 years the property will be in much better shape and the land more productive to the extent that the Guild will be proud to embrace Uncllys as an exemplar of its principles and practice as a charity" (27 Apr. 2004 letter, in possession of J. Iles). In 2008, Uncllys Farm received a Regional Highly Commended recognition in Natural England's Future of Farming Awards. The award is for farmers "who have made the greatest contribution to . . . conserving England's special wildlife and landscapes and to helping people have access to . . . natural environment" (*Future of Farming* 12). The Ileses seemed to have made good on their promise also by involving the Guild with the Wyre Community Land Trust.

Trust

Although in the, already quoted, 2006 article John and Linda Iles declared that "In [their] stewardship of the holding [they would] be seeking to live out John Ruskin's principles and ideas that form the basis of the Charity the Guild of St George," the couple did not come to the Guild through their interest in Ruskin's thought. John Iles admitted that he knew just about enough of Ruskin to understand his concern for the working-man's conditions of life, but in preparation for their interview with the Guild, the Ileses found out about Ruskin's interest in the environment (Iles. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). It was on this ground that their and the Guild's interests coincided. Discussing the beginnings of his acquaintance with John Iles, James Dearden, Master of the Guild 2004-2009, recalls the Guild gave John Iles the tenancy based on his good ideas for the farm (Dearden. Personal letter. 13 Apr.

2019). These included forming a community of like-minded people around the Farm to give and receive help: visitors could "draw peace and inspiration from Uncllys and perhaps decide for themselves ways in which they could tread more lightly on earth" (Iles and Iles, "Ruskin"). To a Master alarmed at a rapid decline of the much-loved-by-Ruskin wildflowers, the Ileses' proposals to care for Uncllys meadows seemed particularly appealing. Animal grazing seemed the best way to ensure the return of wildflowers at Uncllys, and to this end John and Linda Iles began their conservation grazing project. Conservation grazing is a scheme whereby animals such as cows, sheep and pigs are put on land to eat thick grasses and bramble that otherwise would close in on woodland meadows. Leaving the meadows open is important as they are habitats for wildflowers and associated insects. The Ileses started small, with just two Dexter cows, but with a lot of enthusiasm and support from their friends: John Iles remembers that on the very first day of their new life at Uncllys, they had a group of friends help with getting the house ready (Iles. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). Friends and their Church community also helped with fencing the fields for grazing, planting of the Farm vegetable garden and the wildlife pond. The seeds of their community-focused environmental project had been planted.

Being a forest farm, Uncllys is in a small clearing and suffers from poor soils, like the rest of the Wyre "[lacking] potassium and calcium making [them] acidic soils good for heather bracken and oaks," writes Paul Evans in *Oak Earth* (2018). Thus, like all of the Guild tenants before them, the Ileses would not have been able to support themselves solely from their smallholding. They did, however, try to make the Farm as self-sufficient as possible while maintaining a low environmental impact, for example by using solar power and wood-burning stoves installed in the refurbished farmhouse. A 2004 Uncllys Farm letterhead said: "Producing quality beef, pork, eggs in the heart of the Wyre Forest for those who care about the environment and farming" (21 Aug. 2004 letter, in possession of J. Iles). While making sure that there was plenty of dead wood left for rare invertebrates, the Ileses replanted the Uncllys orchard with twenty-seven new cherry trees that they hoped would produce fruit for sale; Linda Iles made a vegetable garden near to the

house and kept chickens. The beef would come from their Dexters grazing Wyre meadows.

The Uncllys herd of cattle slowly increased and so did their grazing range in association with English Nature (now Natural England). Through their involvement in the community life in Bewdley and their farmer neighbours in the Wyre, the Ileses developed a good relationship with public and private landowners in the area. English Nature was one such landowner neighbour. They owned meadows in the Wyre Forest and were looking for someone to graze them according to a strict, rotational, regime. As he recalls, John Iles was not opposed to becoming involved with English Nature in this way, but did not feel he wanted to embark on this as an individual farmer (Iles. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). He preferred to set up a new organisation, a company limited by guarantee, that could "acquire assets, apply for grants, enter into contracts and if needed employ staff [as well as] take risks and potential liabilities" (Iles. Personal email. 4 June 2019). With encouragement and small financial support from English Nature, John Iles established the Wyre Community Land Trust on 27 April 2007.

According to the National Community Land Trust Network, Community Land Trusts "are a form of community-led housing, set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage homes as well as other assets important to that community, like community enterprises, food growing or workspaces." Like the Wyre Community Land Trust, Community Land Trusts may have aims other than housing, for example conservation or simply protecting an area for the good of a community. In this, but on a much smaller scale, CLTs are similar to the Ruskin-inspired National Trust, which seeks "to look after Places of historic interest or natural beauty permanently for the benefit of the nation" (Charity Commission). Similar aims are embodied in the WCLT's name by the use of the word "trust" and they connect the organisation to Ruskin's thought more than John Iles perhaps anticipated when setting it up. While not discussing the Guild's rural properties in the Wyre specifically, but simply addressing Ruskin's relationship with the idea of trust, Marcus Waithe's paper "Nature's Uses: John Ruskin, Trusteeship and Environmental Economy" inspired me to reflect on that early connection between the WCLT and Ruskin. In his paper, Waithe reminds his readers of Ruskin's Christian

beliefs and opinion that "the will of the Ruling Spirit [is] called Trust" (1).[38] In accordance with that, humans were entrusted with, or willed by God to provide, "guardianship over the created world" (2); they may use it, but in such a way, as to be able to pass it on to future generations. The legal understanding of the word trust in Ruskin's times, provided by Waithe, echoes this belief. According to John Iles, the Community Land Trust format and the WCLT's name emerged through discussions with early Directors. In Iles's words, it was called:

> Wyre—because that [was] the area of focus and benefit; Community—because sustainability [would] come from the engagement of people from [the] local community, their skills, experience and passion; Land—because that [was] the focus of activity to bring underused land back into productive use thereby enhancing its biodiversity; Trust—because it need[ed] to be an organisation that [would be] trusted by landowners and the general public. (Iles. Personal email. 4 June 2019)

Thinking about land in a similarly Ruskinian way, as a property in people's custodianship, is visible in John and Linda Iles's attitude to Ruskin Land, exemplified in the Ileses' repeated use of the word "steward" or "stewardship": from the cited already 2006 article "Ruskin, Bewdley and Sustainability" to the interview given for this project in 2018, where John Iles calls himself "a steward or overseer" (Iles. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). The Ruskinian connection does not end there. From a legal point of view, Community Land Trusts are regulated by the Housing and Regeneration Act of 2008 and can only be set up for the benefit of a community and all its profits must be used for the benefit of the community. The WCLT in its Memorandum and Articles of Association declares its objects to be the promotion of "the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and access to open space"; advancement of "the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment"; and, provision or improvement or assistance "in providing or improving community, social, recreational and leisure time facilities." All are

[38] Draft, quoted by author's permission.

"principally for the benefit of the community" (WCLT Memorandum 1).[39] The minutes of WCLT's first Board meeting elaborate on these by adding that the first objective is acquisition of land "a remnant traditional orchard or meadow," including through lease or "management agreement/licence" in the Wyre area (WCLT Minutes, 27 Apr. 2007). Acquisition of land for the benefit of a community would sound very familiar to the readers of Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* and to Companions of the Guild of St. George whose ranks John and Linda Iles had by then joined. Created with the same objectives in mind, the Guild had not actively pursued them at Ruskin Land since the 1930s, when Uncllys and adjacent woodland was bought in an attempt to fulfil Ruskin's wish of buying land, in that instance done to protect that part of the Forest from conifer planting (see Chapter 2). This primary objective was revisited in the 1960s and 70s when the Guild revised its Memorandum and Articles of Association and redefined its aims. Purchase and improvement of land had been replaced in the new Memorandum by the aim:

> To promote the advancement of education and training in the fields of rural economy, industrial design and craftsmanship, and appreciation of the arts, in accordance with the principles set out in *The Letters to Working Men* [sic] by John Ruskin published under the title of *Fors Clavigera*. (qtd. in Dearden 31-32)

This revision was done for the purpose of the Guild's application for educational charity status and seems to have been a theoretical rather than practical aim until the 2000s.[40] Galvanised by the work of the Wyre Community Land Trust and John Iles's encouragement as a new Guild Director, the Guild would revisit its aims again and become much more involved with Bewdley, as discussed further in this chapter.

The WCLT soon began fulfilling its communitarian and environmental objectives. Land was acquired through purchase—an SSSI meadow was bought in

[39] WCLT documents cited here are held in the WCLT office on St. George's Farm, Bewdley. I tried to give dates and page numbers where possible.

[40] It also seems that charity status was sought out primarily for financial rather than any other reasons. In his *John Ruskin's Guild*, Dearden writes of this: "[the Master] Farquharson improved the financial status of the Guild by revising its Memorandum and Articles of Association thus enabling it to be recognised as a charity for purposes of income tax" (31).

2008 by the Trust thanks to a generous donation by one of the organisation's first Directors—or land management agreements on non-Guild sites in the Wyre area. The Trust's primary responsibilities as stewards were grazing and orchard restoration work. The Wyre is owned in part by public bodies, the Forestry Commission and Natural England (which replaced English Nature in 2006), and in part by small private landowners, some of whom are not farmers. Apart from their grazing contracts with Natural England, the WCLT sought out management agreements with private landowners. Since most of such landowners' plots of land were too small to interest DEFRA on their own, the WCLT approached landowners with neighbouring plots. This way, small plots could be bundled together into an area big and varied enough to be eligible for 10-year contracts called Higher Level Stewardships (HLS). These contracts would pay for infrastructure: fencing and water facilities for the animals in exchange for an agreed regime of grazing. Grazing costs were supplemented by grants from Natural England and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, which also awarded grazing contracts to the WCLT. Management of old orchards which, historically, had been the source of Bewdley's main crops (see Chapter 2), involved their careful restoration, much like what John and Linda Iles did at Uncllys. This meant replanting the orchards with traditional varieties of local fruit (cherries, apples, plums)[41] while leaving some of the dead trees in place for rare insects to thrive. Apart from restoring the orchards, the WCLT also provided care for them for the duration of the agreements: new trees needed careful pruning to prolong their life and thus ensure that there would be a lot of old, invertebrate-friendly wood once the tree reached old age (Iles and Iles, "Ruskin"). Orchard restoration work was also done through contracts with Grow With Wyre: a £4 million Wyre-wide project run by the Forestry Commission which appointed WCLT as one of its agents for orchard-restoration work and educator in rural skills. This was a valuable relationship for the WCLT and supplied the Trust with regular payments as well as some small donations of equipment, both of which allowed the

[41] Reflecting modern tastes—fewer plum trees were planted than grew at Uncllys originally. The same happened to the replanted Graham orchard at St. George's Farm (Dearden. Personal letter. 13 Apr. 2019).

organisation to fund its activities and make a steady profit that could be invested in growth.

(Re)Building of the Community

Environmental pursuits were entwined with the Trust's "Community" objective and there were several aspects of that. First and foremost, the Trust had been formed with conservation work for the benefit of the community in mind and was fulfilling that through their land management work. This was strictly connected to bringing together a group of landowners within the Wyre whose land could be managed by the WCLT. Although the degree to which these landowners were connected to one another (other than by being neighbours) cannot be measured, they all formed the first community for whose benefit the WCLT worked. The organisation itself, with all its Directors and growing number of staff, also formed a small community. The third, and most numerous, group that is part of the community are all the conservation and woodworking volunteers on whose work the WCLT has depended over the years.

In 2010, the Wyre Community Land Trust was looking after "60 separate fields, 33 of them SSSIs for their wildflowers and invertebrates" with a vision to "build a social enterprise that has about 300 acres of grazing land and orchards" (Frost, "Ruskin Studio" 11). In 2019, the area that the Trust managed, was about 850 acres (Greeves, "Ruskin Land" 62). Moving cattle between sites, maintenance work on fencing, etc., wildflower surveys, replanting of and caring for orchards, weed-control, fruit-picking, hay-making and much more have been traditional tasks of WCLT's conservation volunteers. They usually meet two days a week to work on tasks set by the farm manager or volunteer coordinator. This group has a woodworking counterpart who also meet twice a week to work on small timber projects for the Trust. Most often, they create Ruskin oak objects for sale to supplement WCLT's income. The woodworkers are constantly improving their skills, learning from more experienced members of the group, and expanding the product range. Starting from bird and bat boxes and small domestic products, by 2019 they had progressed onto cleft gates, simple furniture items such as benches and tables and, in the biggest project yet, even built and installed a small jetty and a wooden

bridge in Kidderminster and Bewdley. Throughout the years, the volunteering group has numbered between 20 and 90, with a small group of about 30 regularly attending on the four volunteer days. In return for their dedication and hard work, the WCLT offers its volunteers a safe setting to pursue their environmental or woodworking interests, learn and be creative. Volunteers can gain new skills from each other or on courses organised by the Trust; they can find out about Ruskin and his thought at educational events (mostly organised by the Guild) at Ruskin Land; and they are encouraged to participate in the arts and crafts courses and activities that have been increasingly more frequently organised at Ruskin Land.

Education plays an important role in both the Guild's and the Wyre Community Land Trust's vision for Ruskin Land. From forest schools and school visits for local children, through family art and nature events to practical skills courses for adults (animal husbandry, orchard management, etc.), the WCLT is looking for ways to fulfil its mission and ensure its survival as all the events are also a source of income for the organisation. Anticipating this, John and Linda Iles, with generous support from Natural England and the Guild of St. George, converted a barn at Uncllys farm into an attractive timber-framed Ruskin Studio for educational and artistic use, as well as first office space for the WCLT. Speaking at the grand opening in Summer 2010, Clive Wilmer, who had taken over from James Dearden as Guild Master in 2009, saw the Studio's construction as a return to "Ruskin's Utopian plan to have communities with schools, libraries and galleries on his lands" (*Ruskin's Dream* DVD, 00:58.30-40). In the same speech, Wilmer credited John and Linda Iles with "transform[ing] the modern Guild of St. George and renew[ing] its hopes and prospects" by uniting "the natural world, social conscience, creativity and the things of the spirit" (01.01.52-59; 01.01.38-03.09). The Guild indeed had been looking to redefine its purpose and decide its role in the twenty-first century and association with the Ileses at Uncllys helped shape its future.

Back to the Land

In 2001, writing for the new Guild magazine *The Companion*, Guild Director David Barrie wrote of the need to review Guild activity, decide its future and the best use of its resources. This was necessary as, in his estimate, the Guild "staggered, rather

than strode, through the twentieth century" ("Future of the Guild" 7). In that same issue of the magazine, Guild properties in Bewdley are mentioned: Cedric Quayle's article about the then tenants at Uncllys introduces the readers to the Guild's possessions in the Wyre in a way which suggests Companions were not widely aware of their existence: "[the Meehans] are . . . tenants of one of the Bewdley properties owned by the Guild, where there is also a bungalow and another small holding [sic] set in the middle of the Wyre Forest" ("Sowing & Reaping" 25). There is considerable contrast between then and now, when Ruskin Land is proudly advertised on the Guild website and at Guild events. Several years seem to have passed between Barrie's article in *The Companion* and the moment when the Guild seriously began to consider its options in the new century. Speaking about that time in the Guild's history, David Barrie recollected that in the 1990s the Guild seemed undecided about its common aim and was not confident in the organisation's consequence (Barrie. Telephone interview. 15 Aug. 2019). The centenary of Ruskin's death in 2000 seems to have both forced and facilitated thinking about Ruskin's relevance in the twenty-first century, which also involved looking at the land. Personal changes in the Guild, recognition of the importance of campaigning, a renewed public interest in Ruskin as well as a change in public perception of the environment created an advantageous climate in which the Guild could create a new vision for its future (Barrie. Telephone interview. 15 Aug. 2019). This coincided—almost as if the Third Fors was involved—with changes at Uncllys. The Ileses became Guild tenants and were transforming the Farm and rekindling the Guild Directors' interest in the estate. These seem to have decided that it was time to remind Companions of the Guild's possessions in the Wyre and so the 2007 Annual General Meeting was organised in Bewdley and involved a visit to the reinvigorated Uncllys. At that AGM, John Iles, a tenant and new Guild Companion, was lifted into the status of Guild Director and thus joined the organisation's decision-making body. The Guild needed someone who could, in Dearden's words, "guide our support of activities in the field of rural economy" (MR 2006).[42] On the

[42] Master's Reports (MR) and other Guild of St. George documents (reports, minutes, etc.) cited in this chapter are held in the Guild office in Meersbrook Hall, Sheffield. I tried to give dates and page numbers where possible.

Board, Iles joined the man who had been looking after Ruskin Land for close to forty years, Cedric Quayle. With John Iles, there were now two Bewdley Companions on the Guild's Board, making Ruskin Land considerably better represented.

Annual Master's Reports and articles in *The Companion* show that around that time, the Guild was trying to pursue its rural economy objectives by supporting small environment- and community-oriented schemes in and outside the Wyre. There was financial support for the Wyre Forest meadows and orchards; a small grant to a pilot scheme of a project called "Sowing Seeds for the Future" to distribute "Garden Loan Boxes to home-based carers [to help them] fit into their local communities using horticulture as the mechanism" (MR 2006-7); and to an international River Project "which involve[d] a climate change/arts programme" between the UK and Gujarat, India (MR 2007-8). The Guild had been working with Natural England on the preservation of English wildflowers on its pure, chemically unaltered meadow in Sheepscombe. In Bewdley, plans were being made to exhibit some of the Guild's art collection at the local Museum and a section of an oak tree cut at Ruskin Land was sent to Sheffield to join the collection there. Although no clear plan for Ruskin Land had yet been developed, James Dearden foretold its future direction in his Master's Report for the year 2008-9: discussing the Guild's rural aims, he quoted Ruskin's "We will try to make [sic] some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful and fruitful" (qtd. in MR 2008-9).[43] Soon, "Beautiful, Peaceful, and Fruitful" was to become Ruskin Land's motto.

In 2008 the Guild set up a working group to decide the Guild's future. Janet Barnes, Guild Director responsible for the Sheffield collection, was joined by John Iles of Bewdley and Clive Wilmer, the future Master of the Guild, who wrote of the challenge of deciding "how [the Guild] might develop in relation to the contemporary world without losing its roots in Ruskin's vision" ("Meeting" 2). Environmental work was clearly high on the agenda: in 2009-10, the Guild supported construction of the already mentioned Ruskin Studio, looking forward to its environmental and educational purpose. In the field of arts, there were plans for a series of exhibitions called the Ruskin Triennial to be held at Sheffield. These were

[43] This has been misquoted repeatedly at Ruskin Land, perhaps in an attempt to make it more appealing. The actual wording is "We will try to *take* some small piece . . ." (emphasis added).

going to use artwork from the Guild's Sheffield treasury to illustrate Ruskinian themes, the first of which was environment and sustainability and took place in October 2009. Discussing the first Triennial and its theme, Wilmer had something to say of the word "sustainability": it was "a modern term, but an idea central to Ruskin's thought. His prescience with regard to climate change is unequalled in nineteenth-century writing; it is one of the reasons for pursuing his agenda today and regarding it as something to be developed" albeit in a modern way and not "[trying] to live as if this were the nineteenth century" ("New Master's Acceptance" 2). This was a significant declaration of intent in a speech by the new Master of the Guild.

The chance to apply Ruskinian principles in a modern way was being presented to the Guild by the Wyre Community Land Trust. In 2019, looking back over his time on the Guild Board of Directors, Clive Wilmer said that before John Iles started the WCLT and became involved as Guild Director, "there had been a tendency to regard [Bewdley] simply as some properties that the Guild owned, from which it earned a modest income. And the idea that it should be something used actively as part of our objectives as a charity is really largely John's doing" (Wilmer. Personal interview. 25 Jan. 2019). Beginning with offering moral support to the WCLT and then small annual grants for the grazing project, the Guild gradually became more invested in Ruskin Land and involved in the Wyre Forest. In 2013, Wilmer explained that to Companions: "Through the work that has recently been going on in the Wyre Forest, we have the opportunity of achieving on that land, in twenty-first century terms, something like Ruskin's original plan for it" ("Guild Today" 11-12). Part of that plan, or at least an appealing idea, was recreating what had been there in Edith Hope Scott's times. John and Linda Iles and the WCLT had already sown the seeds for a real Ruskinian community with Ruskin Land tenants doing Guild work. The Guild hoped to see the Bungalow and St. George's Farm join in and to this end began thinking about the future of its forest properties. The Ileses were already at Uncllys on a lengthy lease, so when the Bungalow and St. George's Farm eventually became vacant, they hoped these could house more people interested in Guild priorities. In his Master's Report for 2009-10, Wilmer declared that "the next tenant of the Bungalow will almost certainly be

directly connected with the Guild and its activities, and this in turn suggests a further transformation to Ruskinland" (sic) (MR 2009-10). In the case of the Bungalow, this was briefly fulfilled when the new WCLT farm manager moved into it in 2012. However, after that, the tenancy was given to a young family unconnected with the Guild or the Trust. At St. George's, after Jack Bishop's death, new Companions and tenants Neil Sinden and Lynne Roberts threw themselves into Ruskinian work bringing with them expertise from their previous lives as Director of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and teacher respectively. In residence for two years, the couple helped WCLT develop an extra dimension: cultural and educational. Sinden and Roberts made it their mission to spread the word about Ruskin Land and its heritage, as well as make it accessible to the community beyond Bewdley, especially schoolchildren from underprivileged areas in Kidderminster. Both these objectives were included in the "Ruskin in Wyre" successful Heritage Lottery Fund application that the couple worked on while tenanting St. George's Farm. After St. George's Farm became vacant again in 2017, it was let out to a new family. They are not Companions or involved much with the WCLT, but they seem enthusiastic and sympathetic to the cause of self-sufficient living and craftsmanship. Like Bungalow tenants, they too have a young family, thus fulfilling Ruskin's vision of having families settle his land—although it is impossible to say whether the Guild considered this while letting out the houses.

Even with two non-Guild families in residence at Ruskin Land, Bewdley in 2019 resembles the Bewdley from E.H. Scott's times more than ever before. In Scott's times, Bewdley Ruskinians were all settlers from elsewhere (mainly Liverpool) who came to Bewdley because of its connection to Ruskin. In the twenty-first century, this is reversed: locals are joining the Guild because they become attracted to Ruskin's ideas expressed through the Guild's work in the Wyre. There are Guild Companions among the Wyre Community Land Trust members, both resident and non-resident in Bewdley; two Companions are living in a house with Ruskinian connections in neighbouring Ruskin Land St. John's Lane (see Chapter 2). Ruskin Land itself has had between two and four Guild Companions as tenants since 2004. There are also at least seven Companions in Bewdley town. Two Bewdley Companions also serve as Directors on the Guild's board. Local Bewdley

Companions, as well as other members of the new Ruskin Land community, speak about their involvement there in my ethnographic study in Chapter 4.

Making the Wyre Sustainable

As the Guild was a substantial landowner in the Wyre, John Iles urged the Guild Master and Board of Directors to get more involved in the life of the whole Forest. This could be done via a new Forest forum set up under the name Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership (WFLP). The Partnership began in 2012 as a legacy project to an earlier Wyre-wide scheme, the 2008-2012 HLF Grow With Wyre (GWW): an umbrella project for almost 30 separate but "complementary projects to restore the oak forest, its traditional orchards and meadows, rural crafts, butterfly conservation" and educate visitors to the Forest (Report to the Board, 6 July-30 Nov. 2007). The Partnership was also an innovative attempt to bring together all Wyre landowners in order to create, and then implement, a common management policy for the Forest, in an effort "to demonstrate a new, community based approach" (Iles, "Bewdley and the Rural Economy" discussion paper). Invited to join the Partnership were both public (Forestry Commission, Natural England) and private Forest landowners. Both the Wyre Community Land Trust, who already looked after hundreds of acres of land in the Forest and was to take on orchard restoration for the WFLP, and the Guild, who owned Wyre land, decided to participate. In fact, representing the WCLT, John Iles joined as vice-chair of the Partnership, and Clive Wilmer, representing the Guild, became a board director at the WFLP (July 2012 Guild Minutes 13). The Partnership's goal was to ensure sustainability of the Forest and this was to be done on two fronts: cultural and environmental.

Since the WFLP was going to be "looking at the social, economic, environmental and historic aspects of the Wyre" (Iles, "Bewdley"), it required a coherent cultural vision. Seeing it as an opportunity to emphasise the Wyre's connection to Ruskin, Wilmer offered his help in creating such a vision, much of which the WCLT seems to have embraced and implemented at Ruskin Land. Wilmer's document, "Towards a Cultural Strategy. Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership" (2014) recognised that the WFLP's aim was to develop "a new

woodland culture" that combined "making timber and woodlands work again" with "a creative element."[44] According to the paper, these aims were similar to Ruskin's whose "ideas for Wyre . . . combined a vibrant rural economy with arts and crafts to create his 'beautiful, peaceful and fruitful' part of England." This could be achieved by utilising Guild's expertise in the realm of culture and its Wyre Forest possessions at Ruskin Land: St. George's Farm could become "a real cultural hub for Wyre" (4). The paper envisaged an educational and creative programme that would engage the community and attract it to the Forest in an attempt to make the Wyre more relevant and useful. As such, "it will be [easier] to sustain and protect it" (2). Potential cultural activity could involve having a writer and/or artist residencies; "using the Forest as a place to undertake creative work" by making studio or workshop space available; using the Forest as a gallery for artwork; exploring the Forest's social history and traditions; creating "creative commercial businesses" (2-4). WFLP's cultural strategy had to go hand in hand with its environmental objectives for the Wyre. The Forest's rich fauna and flora had to be supported while at the same time the expectation in the Partnership was that the woodland would work for itself. These two were not at all mutually exclusive if a sensible coppicing regime was developed for the Forest. Tasked with this was Tim Selman, who, as Strategic Development Manager for the WFLP, created a Management Plan for the Wyre Forest. When his role finished in 2016, Selman moved to the Wyre Community Land Trust bringing his expertise and ideas for the Forest, environmental and cultural, with him. With Selman, the WCLT also took, or at least borrowed, WFLP's "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful": used once already by James Dearden as a vision for Ruskin Land, it had now been adopted as Ruskin Land's motto.

Before being taken on as the WCLT's Managing Director, Tim Selman had worked with the Guild and the WCLT on a Woodland Management Plan and a general vision for Ruskin Land. With the death of Bishop, the Guild's oldest tenant, in 2014, St. George's Farm became available for development. Ideas put forward by

[44] Document in the Guild of St. George collection, Meersbrook Hall, Sheffield. A pdf version of the document called *A Vision for Wyre* is available online on the Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership website.

the WCLT included using the farmhouse as office space and accommodation for employees and also creating a new larger structure with several units of rentable workshop or studio space on the ground floor and living quarters above. This would have required the Guild to invest considerably in the site and has not been realised and perhaps never will. Long-term commitment from the Guild would give the WCLT security and ability to apply for funding for long-term projects. On the other hand, the Guild as property owner must make sure that whatever investments it makes at Ruskin Land will give a return and it must also think of succession—should the WCLT cease to exist or move away from Ruskin Land, the developed land it leaves behind must have a new purpose. Working out solutions that would keep both sides satisfied must be a challenge at times.

Not able to implement its grander schemes, the WCLT is adopting a policy of small steps: a volunteer rest area with a kitchenette and, much needed, toilets were converted from an old pigsty in 2016-17, and a small workshop space was created and is being let out to a non-resident blacksmith. St. George's farmhouse was let first to Guild, and then non-Guild tenants (as discussed above) and the WCLT was moved from the Ruskin Studio at Uncllys to a portacabin at St. George's Farm and have been in residence there since Summer 2016. There is hope eventually to convert one of the buildings into proper office space with an area for a little Ruskin library, but I have not been made aware that a timeline exists for that. Like other Community Land Trusts, the WCLT would also like to be able to build some housing for its members. These new cottages at Ruskin Land could house the WCLT's younger employees, especially those working in the Forest. Both Tim Selman and John Iles recognise that these are low-wage positions and Bewdley is an expensive town to live. To Iles, who already lives at Ruskin Land, it is also important people are able to enjoy the Forest as a home, and not just as a place of work. "I feel [employees] lose some of the benefit of being here, because at 5 o'clock they go off to a town to live, whereas 5 o'clock is a time of great peace and tranquillity . . . the day just sort of breathing out a bit and just going beautifully peaceful" (Iles. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018). I would say that these sentiments are Ruskinian in principle: Ruskin's original vision for the communities was to have

groups living and working on the same land. From an environmental point of view, having fewer people travel in by car every day would also be of benefit.

Beautiful, Peaceful, and Fruitful

As already quoted elsewhere in this chapter, Clive Wilmer said in 2010 that the word "sustainability" permeated Ruskin's thinking although he never used it. Used as we understand it nowadays, sustainability means "the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level" (Oxford Lexico). It is acknowledged that, for true sustainability, three factors must be balanced: social, economic, and environmental, although it is not clear when exactly this three-pillar conception dates from (Purvis et al., abstract). In brief, environmental sustainability requires living within the limits of the planet's natural resources; social sustainability involves building and maintaining healthy communities; finally, economic sustainability means ensuring long-term activity by responsibly using resources for profit. These three pillars of sustainability apply on a smaller than planetary scale: to countries, organisations or communities. The Guild of St. George and the Wyre Community Land Trust have used the word "sustainability" while thinking about both their organisational survival and aims. In the context of Ruskin Land, it is worth noting that Ruskin's nineteenth century "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" adopted as the area's motto in the twenty-first century, corresponds to the three pillars of sustainability. I would argue that "beautiful" is the environmental dimension of sustainability, "peaceful" the social, and "fruitful" the economic. I have not found a confirmation, or indeed acknowledgement from the Guild or the WCLT, that Ruskin Land's motto was chosen because it parallels the three dimensions of sustainability. It is difficult therefore to say whether that connection had been made by either organisation. Even so, aspiring for "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" at Ruskin Land seems to mean striving to achieve environmental, social and economic sustainability. In practice at Ruskin Land, these are often intertwined.

The WCLT write on their website: "we want to put [the Wyre Forest] landscape back to work. It's not about turning back the clock. It's about building a sustainable future—by nurturing the environment, offering great value local products, and making it more viable for more people to earn a living from the land"

(WCLT). Looking at the WCLT's activities at Ruskin Land, "Nurturing the environment" can be identified as conservation work, working towards the "beautiful." Allowing people to earn a living off the land happens through creation of jobs at the WCLT, especially in woodland management, as well as training people in the skills they might need to find jobs, either through apprenticeships with the WCLT, attending courses organised by the Trust or learning on the job while volunteering. The WCLT also helps local landowners get income from their land, by obtaining paid Stewardship Schemes for them (as explained above)—this is where the beautiful and fruitful meet. The peaceful, or social aspect, is missing from the extract I took from the WCLT website, but it is present across all of the WCLT's activities. The Trust both is and creates a community. The health here may be physical or mental: some physical exercise is involved in wood and conservation work, and mental well-being is enhanced by being surrounded by nature ecotherapy is recognised now as having a big positive impact on brain activity (Harvard Health Publishing). Social interaction in a relaxed, safe environment such as at Ruskin Land contributes to this. Keeping the public informed and involved in all these activities might help influence their attitude towards sustainability; by convincing them that these activities are for their benefit, as much as for future generations, they are more likely to get involved, and, potentially, consider their impact also outside the Wyre. With *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin intended to "instil the culture of self-sufficiency" in his readers—make them understand what they can do and want to do it (Albritton and Albritton Jonsson 50).[45] Focusing on practice rather than theory, the WCLT seems to share this aim.

WCLT can be considered successful in living out the beautiful and peaceful: many of those involved consider Ruskin Land an especially attractive place to be because of its beauty and tranquillity (see Chapter 4). "Beautiful" appraised professionally through an environmental lens also shows that what the Guild and Wyre Community Land Trust have started at Ruskin Land—restoration[46]—is

[45] Jonathon Porritt writes about the need for such public perception in *Capitalism as if the World Matters* (2005).

[46] A problematic word for Ruskin and also for environmental discussions raising the question of what past moment is being returned to. A similarly ambiguous term gaining in popularity today seems to be "rewilding."

bringing positive results. A Biodiversity Advisory Panel chaired by Professor David Ingram met in 2017 and 2018 to survey Guild land in the Wyre. According to its biodiversity report, "the Guild may be assured that its land and woodland holdings in the Wyre Forest are currently managed most effectively with respect to the conservation and increase of biodiversity. . . . The WCLT team are to be congratulated on their stewardship" (Biodiv. Survey, "Part 2" 1). The Panel recognised common challenges in the Forest (damage by deer and squirrels, invasiveness of bracken) and gave recommendations on further steps, with surveying planned to be repeated to regularly check progress.

The fruitful aspect is the most difficult to achieve at Ruskin Land—and perhaps everywhere in the countryside at the moment. Speaking about Ruskin Land's motto, Clive Wilmer explained why "fruitful" was a challenge:

> I thought that ["beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful"] was a very useful expression, because everybody who likes the countryside, wants a countryside that is beautiful and peaceful. It's really what we go to the country for . . .. But "fruitful" is a complicated idea which adds to that a good deal. I think it expresses the view that we need nature to live, we produce our food by way of nature. So, the land needs to be fruitful in order that we might live, but also in order that we might progress within it, . . . that we might earn income from it or [from] articles that are useful to us. So wood can be used for making things, . . . for sale . . ., and the money can be ploughed back into the land or can be used for other useful activities in the locale you find yourself in. It's all really to do with having a relationship with nature. That relationship can involve activities to our profit as human beings, but it also involves caring for that other organism . . .. I can imagine people coming along and saying "You shouldn't make profit, that's exploitation." That would be very foolish, it seems, to me. Fruitfulness is a good thing. And it's part of the whole process of nature of course. (Wilmer. Personal interview. 25 Jan. 2019)

In accordance with Wilmer's views, at Ruskin Land, the WCLT is trying to demonstrate how the land can be looked after in an environmentally friendly way while at the same time bringing in income. A small part of that is income from meat

sales—a necessary by-product of the conservation grazing – but the majority of WCLT income comes from its woodland.

Since 1996, the Guild woodland had been on a 21-year lease to Natural England which was responsible for its management. In 2013, John Iles suggested the Guild not renew the lease in 2017 as woodland management could be taken over by the WCLT from Natural England and give the Guild more profit. In 2015, the Guild took Iles's advice and asked Tim Selman to draw up a plan for the Guild forest as it was considered necessary to thin the woodland in some areas. That would let in more light and allow other plants and trees to grow, thus helping with diversification of tree species in order to make woodland more resistant to disease and climate change. A product of thinning was timber, carefully harvested by the WCLT since, with environmental goals in sight as well: removal of taller trees created butterfly rides through the Guild forest important for the rare Wyre butterflies such as the pear-bordered fritillary;[47] WCLT volunteers-built boxes have also been installed for dormice and birds. Looking to increase the value of the wood, the WCLT proposed to install a small sawmill at St. George's Farm. The plan received some criticism from Companions and Directors worried about noise levels and generally opposed to spoiling Ruskin's land with such machinery, but after considered discussion the Guild Board approved the plan. Equipped with their own small sawmill, paid for by European Union grants and with the Guild's contribution towards infrastructure costs, the WCLT could now process the timber, thus increasing the product's value six to eight times when sold for construction (WCLT Minutes 19 Oct 2016). They could also begin to make some small pieces themselves and, to this end, transformed an old store at the Farm into a wood workshop space. Twice a week, WCLT woodworking volunteers meet there to work on increasingly more complicated wood products the WCLT then sell. The workshops are also occasionally open to local community groups for creative activities such as carving, and have played host to architecture students and professionals, particularly during 2018 and 2019 Studio in the Woods events, "an education and research project" begun in 2005 by a group of architects interested in "test[ing] ideas through

[47] See Paul Evans's Country Diary series on butterflies in the Wyre, *The Guardian* 6 June 2018.

making" (Invisible Studio). Wyre oak has also been used for the benefit of communities outside Ruskin Land: a school in Kidderminster received a jetty, built by WCLT volunteers, who also built an attractive wooden bridge in a public park in Bewdley; and young people from the mental health charity 42nd Street used Wyre Oak to create beautiful and useful objects to take back with them to Manchester. The Bewdley bridge, apart from allowing local people to enjoy their ponds, can act as advertisement for Ruskin Land and its products, as can cows and pigs grazing in the woods.

As the ambitions and range of activities at Ruskin Land are growing, the Guild—and the Land Trust—are facing the challenge of how to attract enough visitors to fulfil strategic objectives while at the same time avoid destroying the landscape. The main aspect of that seems to concern the access track through the Forest. Unpaved and thus prone to developing holes and becoming impassable with mud, it is an interesting link to the past: Cedric Quayle is in possession of a photograph of Frederick Watson, tenant at St. George's Farm 1911-36, with his horse and trap which, in the winter, used to regularly get stuck so that "it seemed to be floating on a sea of mud" (Wardle and Quayle 55). The road continues to be a problem in the twenty-first century, with one concern being that a paved road would be somewhat out of place at Ruskin Land. There are other challenges too. Although the WCLT have a good reputation among landowners and locals who become involved as volunteers or participate in family or educational events at Ruskin Land, some of the Trust's activities can be seen as controversial. Seeing the Forest as a landscape that needs to be used for its own, as well as the community's benefit (coppicing and thinning allows biodiversity, timber can be sold for profit, etc.) is the ecosystem services approach and falls into the discussion about our right to put a price on nature.[48] Meat and timber production can be also incendiary among increasing fears about humanity's environmental impact and its consequences.[49] The WCLT, and the Guild as landowners, must address these as

[48] See Ian Hodge "use" and "non-use values" (for example, Valuing Nature conference proceedings 2018).

[49] One of the most recent to join the debate, on the side of proponents of using animal grazing—and related meat production—for environmental benefit is Isabella Tree with her book *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm* (2018).

they continue their work in the Forest. The WCLT tries to promote its work, and explain its purpose, during events at Ruskin Land and on local country and forest shows. On site at Ruskin Land it would be advisable to include more visible signage with explanations of the organisation's work, especially on coppicing sites. The presence of cars and machinery should also be addressed as visitors may be concerned about fumes. Ruskin Land is definitely not the Ruskinian ideal of land toiled using only the powers of man, beast and nature: the WCLT try to use horses for logging wood where possible, but a lot of their work relies on petrol-fuelled machinery. The site's forest location and ensuing inaccessibility by public transport—it is about 20 minutes on foot from the nearest bus stop in Bewdley—also means that tenants, employees, volunteers and visitors all arrive on site in cars, often one person per vehicle. It might be advisable to think about a professional carbon footprint appraisal to check the WCLT's impact and, depending on the result, consider ways in which this could be offset. Beyond WCLT and the Guild's control are impending political changes impacting farming, such as lack of European funding and new laws. Fortunately, at the time of writing, it seems that activities such as those pursued by the Trust—conservation, access, sustainable meat production and improving soil quality rather than crop production—will be supported by the British government according to the 2018 Agriculture Bill and the 25-year Environment Plan (Gov. of UK). The Guild, and the Wyre Community Land Trust, will have to exploit these opportunities and respond to challenges in order to continue their mission and even survive in the twenty-first century. Having taken the first step to present their take on sustainability by means of membership in the Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership, both organisations should now consider joining national, and even international, forums.

Chapter 4: Ruskin, Nature and Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest—Ethnographic Case Study

> "It's not Utopia yet, but we're getting there."
> "Well, you never get to Utopia, do you?"[50]

John Ruskin's achievable Utopia envisaged creating small rural communities, which would support themselves from work on the land and strive for what we now call sustainable lives in appreciation of nature and beauty. I reviewed Ruskin's original environmental and communitarian ideas in the literary, text-based Chapter 1. Chapters 2 and 3 were concerned with how these ideas have been applied in Bewdley over the years: Chapter 2 concentrating on the history of the settlement (1870s–2000s), Chapter 3 looking at the most recent (post-2004) and most environmentally informed developments at Ruskin Land to date. This final chapter continues this interdisciplinary trajectory and moves beyond literature and history into the social sciences with an ethnographic enquiry into the attitudes towards nature, Ruskin Land and John Ruskin of the current community at Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest.

The underlying principle of this study is that Ruskin Land is a modern-day rural Ruskinian community. Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, a community is "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common" (Oxford Lexico); communities have a long history of being "a basis of social analysis" (Cope et al. 3). Ruskin Land tenants are a small group of people living together, if as separate family units, on this land. However, in accordance with the second part of OED's definition, Ruskin Land is also what many more individuals than just these three families have in common. There are Guild Companions, neighbours who are Guild Companions, Guild Directors, Wyre Community Land Trust (WCLT) board members and employees, WCLT volunteers, and even landowners for whom WCLT manages land, both individual and

[50] Participants 5 and 6. Personal interview. 6 Nov. 2018.

organisational (Natural England, Forestry Commission). They could all be considered members of this community.

The community is unquestionably rural. Ruskin Land entails about 200-acre area of woodland, meadows and orchards with two smallholdings situated within the Wyre Forest, about 1.5 miles from the nearest town, Bewdley. It is a modern-day community because, since 2007, it has been run by the WCLT with a conscious effort to bring it into an environmentally sensitive, up-to-date management, as described in depth in Chapter 3. The land is owned by John Ruskin's organisation the Guild of St. George and managed on its behalf by the WCLT. Both organisations are guided in their work by a commitment to Ruskin's thought—or its twenty-first century interpretation. Therefore, all of those involved in the local work of the Guild and the WCLT could be considered Ruskinians by association—although this is often unacknowledged, especially by the volunteers (see below, Case Study 3).

Presenting a qualitative study, this chapter will loosely follow the model of a qualitative study report as characterised by John W. Creswell in *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (2013) and, with J. David Creswell, in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2018). Thus, it consists of three main parts: methodology; results, where three case studies are presented; discussion, with reflections and consideration of limitations of the study. The chapter ends with a conclusion, which contains Ruskin Land policy suggestions and identifies further research possibilities.

Qualitative research relies on non-numerical methods in order to "embrace the quality or essence of something" through examining "the patterns of meaning that emerge from systematic observations of people's words"—as in the study presented in this chapter—and "actions and interactions, and traces or records" (Berg 2). My study of Ruskin Land shares characteristics with other qualitative enquiries across social science disciplines, as collected by Creswell and Creswell (2018). To synthesise from their list, this type of research involves data collection in a natural setting through direct contact with participants. Data collection and interpretation is done by the researcher themselves and using instruments (questionnaires, software) of their choice. Data is analysed in a multistep inductive

process with deductive elements (for example, deciding if more information is needed based on emerging themes). A qualitative research process is emergent and may change (for instance, the interview questions) as data collection progresses, but its goal is ultimately to learn how participants understand the problem under study, or as Creswell and Creswell put it, "to develop a complex picture" by "reporting multiple perspectives" sometimes with the help of visual aids (182).

The particular research design employed in the following study is a mini-ethnography with three case studies. Drawing from anthropology and sociology, ethnographies study groups of participants "located in the same place" or interacting frequently, and examines "shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs, and language" (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 90). This is usually done over an extended period of time and involves extensive fieldwork and immersing oneself in the culture. A mini-ethnography does not require as much involvement and time. As Fusch et al. highlight in "How to Conduct a Mini-Ethnographic Case Study: A Guide for Novice Researchers" (2017), a mini-ethnography can be conducted in weeks rather than years and be successfully used to centre "on a specific or a narrow area of inquiry" to allow researchers "to understand the cultural norms, values, and roles" of participants (925-26). While it may retain some features of ethnography (for example, gatekeepers, key informants, issues of reliability and validity), an important advantage of a mini-ethnography is reduction of sample sizes, or, as Fusch et al. put it, reaching "data saturation . . . far sooner because the research is bounded in time and space by a case study design" (926).

My mini-ethnography also includes case studies. Case studies are in-depth studies used to present a particular subject. They concentrate on individuals, groups, organizations or communities and involve "systematically gathering enough information . . . to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject of the study experiences things as he, she, or they operate and function in their group or setting" (Berg 6). There are three case studies in this chapter, making it a multiple-case study with separate analyses of each case followed by a final cross-case analysis where the three are compared and contrasted.

Methodology

The study was designed with the primary goal to understand why people come together at Ruskin Land to look after nature if it is not to support themselves from it economically. This was to be learned through talking to past and present Ruskin Land Guild Companions, WCLT staff and volunteers in order to capture any values of community and environmental sustainability they may have, as well as attitudes to Ruskin. This section looks at how the research was conducted and discusses the study design, selection of participants, instruments used for data collection and the process itself, and, finally, the strategy of data analysis.

Study design, study setting, tools

In accordance with University ethical policy, I sought and obtained approval for the study from the Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire Research Ethics Committee. I began collecting data in November 2018 and finished in May 2019, gathering 35 interviews in total: 30 (Participants 1-25 and 29-33) were collected on site at Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest or in Bewdley in the course of four visits; four interviews with participants unavailable at Ruskin Land were collected in London (Participants 26-28) and Crewe (Participant 34); one was conducted over Skype (Participant 35). Judged by the acceptance ratio, the research topic could be considered neutral or interesting to the study participants, most of whom responded positively to being asked for an interview. From among all the people I approached for the interviews (36), I had only one rejection justified by the person's professed lack of sufficient knowledge about Ruskin Land and its management.

The interviews were recorded using a Zoom H4N Pro recorder and, in one instance, using a phone due to a battery failure on the recorder. The failure occurred during one of the interviews at Ruskin Land and I was forced to note down the general message of the remainder of the conversation and this I indicated in the interview transcript.

I chose to conduct interviews rather than collect written answers. I saw face-to-face interviewing as having more potential to elicit attractive details by allowing for spontaneity of the responses and the possibility to immediately ask

follow-up questions and generally "control the line of questioning" (Creswell and Creswell 188). I believe requesting written answers would not have had such benefits and could have discouraged potential respondents, thus limiting the amount of data collected. Participants may have considered it time-consuming to put things in writing or fear it would be difficult to express themselves in that way. However, in my ethics application, I did provide for the possibility of using an online survey and I was prepared to use it in case of low recruitment success rate. It was not necessary to use that tool.

In total, I collected 550 minutes (over 9 hours) of audio material which I then transcribed (for details, see Procedure below). Transcribed interviews I imported into NVivo 11 Pro, a qualitative data analysis computer software produced by QSR International, the function of which is to assist sorting, coding and analysing large amounts of non-numerical data.

Participants

All study participants were interviewed by me personally (face-to-face or via Skype). In total, data collection took seven months to complete with the most time being spent on making contact with potential participants and arranging to meet. I obtained access to study site and participants in stages and through different actors. According to Guro K. Kristensen and Malin N. Ravn (2015), who wrote about participant recruitment for qualitative studies, typically the term "gatekeeper" is used to refer to the person who provides access to site and "facilitate[s] contact between a researcher and potential informants" (725). However, Kristensen and Ravn point out that this person is unlikely to be part of the studied population and suggest the term "mediator" is better suited to describe the person who helps recruit participants (725). Adopting this distinction, one of my PhD supervisors can be seen as the gatekeeper who introduced me to key informants from the Guild of St. George and Ruskin Land.[51] These people then helped me identify more potential participants from among local Guild Companions and WCLT employees, and

[51] My gatekeeper's role at Ruskin Land unexpectedly changed towards the end of the study and they did become a participant thus going against Kristensen and Ravn's assertion of the role of gatekeepers.

provided the necessary introductions. This is how I met those responsible for volunteer engagement in the WCLT who, apart from being participants themselves, acted as mediators and allowed me access to WCLT volunteers.

The qualifying criterion for participation in the study was a history of involvement at Ruskin Land. Other criteria were being over 18 years of age and capable of giving informed consent, as well as being involved at Ruskin Land out of their own volition: either in voluntary, unpaid roles (Guild Companions and board members, WCLT board members, WCLT volunteers) or paid roles where these could be considered a matter of personal choice rather than coercion (WCLT employees). In an attempt to ensure participants' connection to Ruskin Land was a choice, I excluded children under the age of 18, including students on work experience.

Based on information from key informants and mediators, I estimated that there were between 50 and 60 potential participants that could be grouped into three sets: Guild Companions (about 12); WCLT board members or staff (about 13); WCLT volunteers (about 30, with two subgroups, woodworks and conservation). I anticipated that my sample would involve up to 10 Companions, up to 12 WCLT board members and employees, and between 15 to 40 WCLT volunteers. This would thus amount to or exceed half of the entire population and ensure representativeness. Unique circumstances of the site's ownership and management (see Chapter 3) meant that my three sets sometimes overlapped. Companions were the most likely to transcend set boundaries by being also WCLT board members and even volunteers, whether active or lapsed (while retaining the status of Companions). WCLT volunteers, with the few Companion exceptions, were the most self-contained set.

In total, 35 people participated in my study and, based on their dominant role (especially if self-identified), I grouped them into the following Case Studies: Case Study 1, 11 Guild Companions; Case Study 2, 8 WCLT board members or staff; Case Study 3, 16 WCLT volunteers (7 conservation volunteers and 9 woodworking volunteers). Within these groupings, some members had supplementary functions, as discussed above: 6 members of CS1 have also been WCLT board or staff members, 6 members of CS1 have also been WCLT volunteers. Three members of CS2 (WCLT board or staff) also are or have been Guild Directors, which affects their

interaction with Ruskin Land as Guild Directors make strategic decisions. Appendix 1 presents group roles of all participants (Fig. 13).

Procedure

All potential participants were given Participant Information Sheets and Interviewee's Consent Forms in advance of data collection (see Appendix 2 and 3 for examples). These forms were either distributed by myself in person or by email, or through my mediators in person or by email. Interview questions were included in the Participant Information Sheet, so participants could make informed decisions about taking part. Those who expressed interest in the study could either contact me by email to decide on the place and time of meeting, or were made aware of the dates of all my visits at Ruskin Land and made themselves available for interviews then. I conducted face-to-face interviews with individuals or small groups of between two and four people if participants expressed a preference for being interviewed as a group (for example, because of time constraints or feeling more confident in a group setting). Where that was the case, I recorded and transcribed individual responses in a group setting. For an example, see Figure 4.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land is important in any way to the local community?
P5: In so far as that it's attracted us here…
P7: I didn't know about Ruskin, I grew up in Bewdley, there was nothing in the Museum about Ruskin. I didn't know anything about it until I came here.
P5: How about The Guild of St. George?
P7: The Guild yes, I knew about the Guild…
P5: I'm not quite clear what the relationship is…

Fig. 4. Example transcription of a group interview (NVivo 11 Pro screenshot).

Once collected, all of the interviews were then transcribed and imported to NVivo for coding. I decided to personally collect and transcribe interviews using non-verbatim transcription. In their article "Is verbatim transcription of interview data always necessary?" (2006) Elizabeth J. Halcomb and Patricia M. Davidson provide a useful overview of advantages and disadvantages of both verbatim and non-verbatim transcription while leaning towards the latter. According to them, "the process of transcription should be more about interpretation and generation of meanings from the data rather than being a simple clerical task [therefore] the need for verbatim transcription in every research project that generates verbal

interview data must be questioned" (40). Encouraged by this view, I chose not to make exact replicas of the audio files. Mine are edited transcriptions: as long as the meaning of the recording did not suffer, I removed the speakers' unconscious repetitions ("you know," "well," etc.) or non-meaningful hesitations ("umm," "erm"). If such words or sounds were used purposefully and added to the conversation, I left them in, as I did with meaningful gaps and hesitations where they expressed an unwillingness to answer or denoted a pause followed by a careful or thoughtful answer. These were transcribed as three dots with no spaces ("…"). If the participants expressed emphasis, I italicised the words. Laughter was also included as "[laughter]," if it helped understand the participants' attitudes. I rarely left full sentences out of the transcription and that was done only if the participants requested that these be considered "off the record" or if they unconsciously began to pursue their own unrelated train of thought, distracting from the topic at hand. In such cases, the transcription features an empty line with a set of ten dots (".....").[52]

As visible in Fig. 4., Participants names were given as "P1," "P2," etc. with "I" being the interviewer (me). All participants were given an option to remain anonymous (option 4 on "Consent Form," see Appendix 3) and although only one person made this choice, I decided to anonymise all answers for the purpose of this chapter, including using the pronoun "they" instead of "he" or "she." It is possible, should any read this study, that participants may recognise their or their acquaintances' answers or opinions. This is not a concern. Keeping the answers anonymous is simply a way of diverting attention from individual answers to opinions and attitudes to study problems as shared by each of the three participant groups. I attach transcriptions of all interviews collected for this study in Appendix 4.

My research instrument was a set of eleven questions, the same for all participants. Questions were of my own design, crosschecked with two members of my supervisory team. While deciding on what and how to ask, I concentrated on

[52] I use the standard MLA style ellipsis of three dots separated by spaces (". . .") to indicate omission when quoting participants' answers in this chapter.

keeping questions open and ethically worded in an attempt not to lead, but rather prompt to reflect. The questions used were:

1. How long have you been (or were) involved with Ruskin Land?
2. What were your reasons for getting involved?
3. How would you describe your role here?
4. Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land? In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?
5. How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?
6. Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth" (*Works*, 1906: 27.90). What is your opinion on that?
7. Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you? If so, what?
8. What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?
9. Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?
10. What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

During interviews, I asked all or some of the questions, depending on how the interview was developing—occasionally participants answered more than one question at once—and sometimes in a different order than listed. The answers I hoped for were on participants' perceptions of Ruskin Land as a community and a nature resource. I was curious to hear if people would express any opinions on the importance of communities and environmental protection, and if so, if they would be in any way similar to Ruskin's own, as expressed in *Fors Clavigera* and discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. I was also keen to find out how people involved at Ruskin Land felt towards John Ruskin. These were the views I was looking for especially while beginning to analyse and code the interviews.

Once the interview collection reached about 75% of the anticipated size, I began transcription and coding. To ensure all data is correctly examined, Creswell and Creswell recommend following a sequence of steps, "from the specific to

general, and involving multiple levels of analysis" (193). Guided by this, I began the process with an initial listening to each interview and making notes of fragments that seemed intriguing or important, including noting down emerging codes or themes I could look for at later stages. I would argue that this was the first step of my analysis despite Steinar Kvale (2007) identifying the process of transcription, my second step, as the first step as "[structuring] the interview conversations in a form amenable to closer analysis, is in itself an initial analysis" (94). However, as should be clear from my explanation of transcribing decisions, I do agree that choices made in the course of transcribing are part of the process of analysis. Once in written format, I re-listened to each interview while following words on paper and corrected the transcriptions where necessary. These I then uploaded to NVivo in preparation for coding.

Assigning codes, or nodes as they are called in NVivo, is a process of labelling fragments of analysed text with words or short phrases in order to help identify recurring themes in textual data. I did this within NVivo by reading each interview transcript and highlighting fragments of text that stood out. These chunks of text I then branded with words or phrases summarising their content, for example, "cooperation," "faith," "nature." The result was a list of 27 nodes. I reduced that number to 18 by standardising and merging to eliminate redundant or overlapping codes. To make sure all the interviews had the same coding, and to add newly emerged codes to interviews coded earlier, I reread each interview, and added and standardised my nodes. Although there were codes escaping easy categorisation, most of the final codes could be split into three sets, each consisting of between 5 and 7 nodes. Figures 5 – 7 are screenshots from NVivo and show nodes within the sets I created, while Figure 8 is an example of how NVivo displays chunks of text from multiple sources if all branded with the same code.

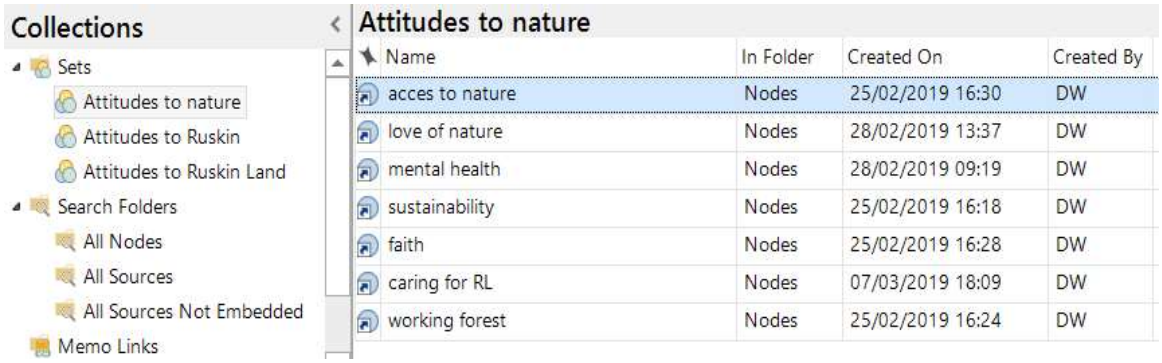

Fig. 5. Nodes within the set Attitudes to Nature (NVivo 11 Pro screenshot).

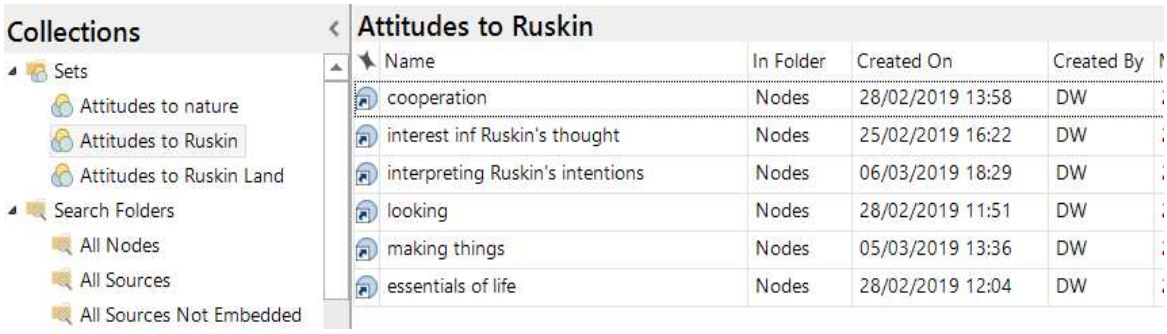

Fig. 6. Nodes within the set Attitudes to Ruskin (NVivo 11 Pro screenshot).

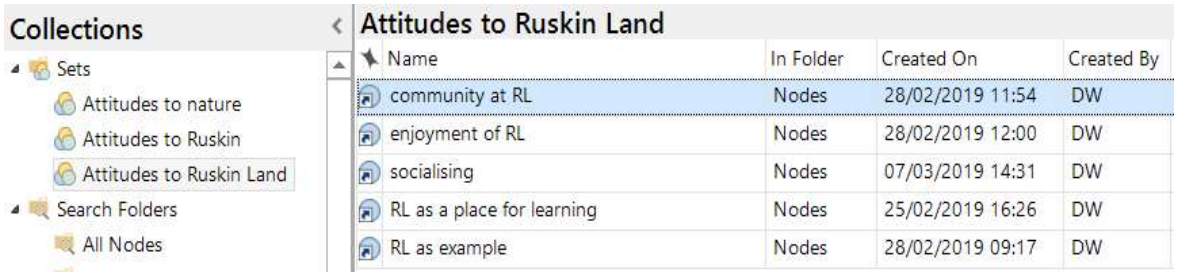

Fig. 7. Nodes within the set Attitudes to Ruskin Land (NVivo 11 Pro screenshot).

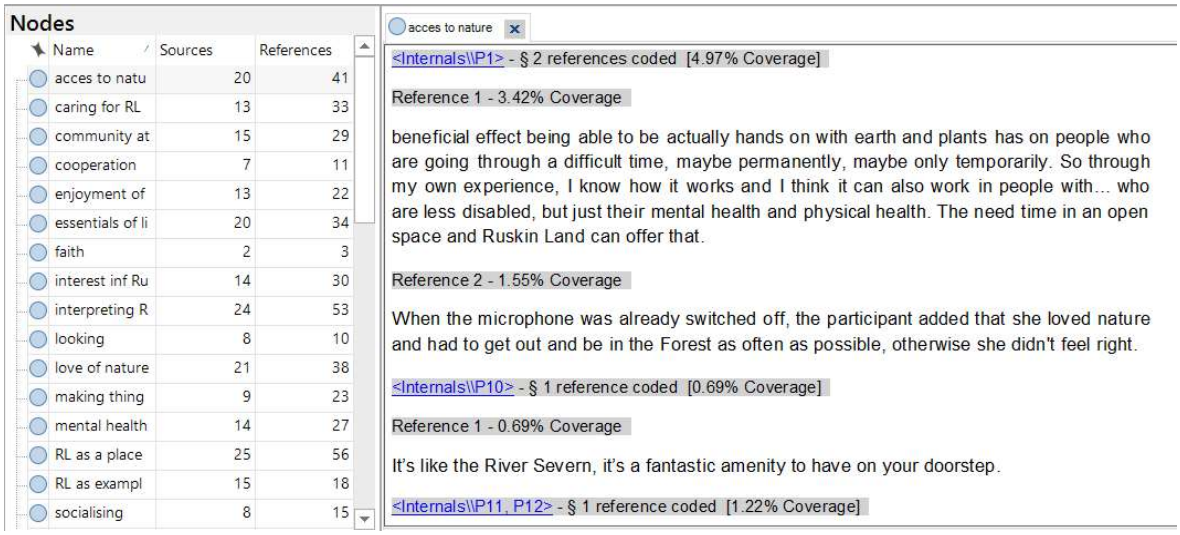

Fig. 8. Chunks of text from multiple sources branded with the same code (NVivo 11 Pro screenshot).

Although I set off with the aim to understand why people at Ruskin Land come together to look after nature, my interviews brought in answers that could be grouped under three headings (as seen in Fig. 5 - 7 above): Attitudes to John Ruskin, Attitudes to Ruskin Land, and Attitudes to Nature. These differed slightly depending on participants' group membership. Therefore, each group is presented in the next section (Results) as a separate Case Study.

Results

In this section, my aim is to present the data collected in my fieldwork in an organised manner and with a minimum of connecting narrative. I use NVivo word frequency clouds as simple visualisations to help convey information in a more accessible way. I discuss the data and the overall implications of the study in the *Discussion* section of this chapter.

Through this study, I hoped to capture each participant group's interpretation of their role in the Ruskin Land project and their relationship with its underpinning values of community and concern for its environment, as well as attitude to John Ruskin. Through the process of coding the interviews collected from participants, I identified three major themes in their responses to my questions:

1. Attitudes to Ruskin. These are ways in which study participants thought and spoke about John Ruskin: the direct and indirect influence of Ruskin's thought on participants' life and attitudes; participants' interpretation of Ruskin's thought; agreement or disagreement with Ruskin's views.

   Codes that led to the formation of this theme were: cooperation, interest in Ruskin's thought, interpreting Ruskin's intentions, looking, making things, essentials of life.

2. Attitudes to Ruskin Land. These are ways in which study participants thought and spoke about Ruskin Land: their feelings towards it; its importance to them and others; their wishes for what Ruskin Land could be; aspects of life at Ruskin Land;

Codes that led to the formation of this theme were: community at Ruskin Land, enjoyment of Ruskin Land, socialising, Ruskin Land as a place for learning, Ruskin Land as example.

3. Attitudes to Nature. These are ways in which study participants thought and spoke about nature: their feelings towards it; opinions of it, especially of nature's significance in life and its impact on people.

Codes that led to the formation of this theme were: access to nature, love of nature, mental health, sustainability, faith, caring for Ruskin Land, working forest.

The themes and supporting quotations are presented below for each group of participants (Case Studies 1-3).

Case Study 1 Guild of St. George Companions

Attitudes to Ruskin

What is their relationship with John Ruskin and his thought?

Six out of 11 participants in this group became Companions of the Guild through their association with Ruskin Land or the town of Bewdley. All participants' involvement at Ruskin Land and in the Guild led to an expanded understanding of aspects of Ruskin's thinking or an interest in the relevance and applicability of his thought, but not all actively seek to expand their knowledge through reading his work. Several expressed admiration for Ruskin's polymathy and the ability to inspire others, but questioned the practicality of some of his ideas or even his likeability as a person: "I don't think I'd like to have him for dinner. . . . He'd be quite a challenging guest" (P18).

Despite this, most feel a responsibility to spread the word about Ruskin: one said they were "keen to keep Ruskin's name up to date and involved in Bewdley" (P18). Two believed that it would be advantageous for Ruskin Land tenants to be sympathetic to the Guild's objectives there or even become Companions with one person saying: "I think being a Companion is a helpful thing, because you do learn a lot more about the breadth of all the projects and the interests of the Guild, and I think that brings people into the whole movement" (P3).

All participants had heard of Ruskin before becoming involved with Ruskin Land, because of their prior interest in art, politics or nature. One declared that "you need to have a basic understanding or interest in any topic he writes about, to be able to connect to him" (P11). Especially resonant or relevant to participants was what they saw as Ruskin's worry about people's alienation from the land and craftsmanship. One said:

> I can see the connection between his ideas and working class people's alienation from the land and from artisanship, craftsmanship. And I can see those ideas are relevant today, they are still relevant. And I know that the ideas that he wrote down, were read by the people who set up the Labour Party. (P10)

One participant found Ruskin's writing prophetic of our current climate worries: "it seems to me that Ruskin foresaw all that, and it's one of the things that makes him a great thinker" (P28).

Three participants admitted to their lives having been impacted by Ruskin's thought. For one, it was his insistence on looking closely at things: "I think the way that he looked at things, that's influenced me. It's influenced me not just in perhaps my own drawing . . . but it's also influenced me in the way that I look at nature (P1)." Looking closely appealed also to the second of the three, who added they have been applying the Ruskinian principles of education for the poor and access to beauty in their private and professional life. The third participant in the trio gained a "wider understanding of the impact of creativity in individuals and societies. . . . And the importance of it" (P11).

Faced with the Ruskinian trinity of "pure Air, Water, and Earth," only one participant agreed that these were "self-evident. A necessity" (P20) without feeling the need to add anything to them. All the others agreed they were necessary, "not just in terms of being able to sustain physical life, but [that] they are very much at the root of all forms of life-giving activities" (P27), yet, found the list wanting. Three out of 11 participants' first reaction was to point out that an emotional component was missing upon which I supplied the remainder of the quotation. They were then able to discuss just the material trio. Two added an energy source such as fire or "a driver" or "natural energy" (P27), one boldly stating: "Ruskin was *not* an

agriculturalist. Simply because the piece of earth looks clean, doesn't mean to say that it will produce food" (P1). In a similar spirit, one pointed out that nothing would grow without the knowledge of farm labour. One participant believed that the three on their own would not be sufficient if there were not already plants and animals within them and two participants remarked that it was important to remember about interactions between the three and not see them as separate needs. Two participants compared the list to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.[53]

Attitudes to Ruskin Land

How do they see Ruskin Land and its function?

Within this theme, three main topics were discussed: Ruskin Land's educational or cultural role and, connected to it, the future development of the space, particularly accessibility. The third topic was the way Ruskin Land was being run and its potential to be an example to others.

A side theme was how Ruskin Land made participants feel. Two talked about it having a difficult-to-define quality that made being there special. According to one, it is "a world on its own, it's a completely different world . . . just *so* peaceful, so natural" (P3). "Quite magical," according to another, the "Forest itself and the nature and all that it brought and all that we saw" (P26).

In terms of Ruskin Land's educational role, participants concentrated on two aspects: firstly, educating the community in proper care of nature, and secondly, the history of the area and community. Describing their own role at Ruskin Land, one participant suggested that the educational role of Ruskin Land is in "helping, *especially local people*, to understand what [nature] is all about and appreciate it as well" (P3).

Two participants commented on Ruskin's idea of having a museum there. For one, "the idea that a rural area can also have major cultural institutions attached to it"

[53] The American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) created a five-level hierarchy of human needs where achieving higher-level needs depends on satisfying these on lower levels. Often pictured in a pyramid, those needs can be divided into basic (food, shelter), psychological (relationships), and self-fulfilment needs (reaching one's potential).

was interesting, “because it’s not something that, on the whole, has happened very much” (P28). They added that Ruskin

> . . . was hoping to build a community that would need facilities of various kinds [and] nowadays, where all populations are much more mobile than they were in Ruskin’s day, some sort of cultural development of that kind is desirable and probable really. (P28)

The other participant saw the idea as having the potential to be fulfilled, but not how Ruskin anticipated:

> I’d also like [Ruskin Land] to be a resource, a learning resource, so that all the resources of books, of art materials and opportunities for people in the community to use it, with the encouragement of local schools, colleges and museums in the local area. So that it becomes a kind of a museum as Ruskin was thinking about it, but not a museum of dead things, or static things, but a museum of working a sustainable project. And they can see how things work, how animals can work in the land without exploiting it, but using it. Properly. For the good of humans. (P1)

One participant was sceptical about Ruskin Land’s impact as an educational space, perhaps with the exception of volunteer training as “about all it does is occasionally bring small groups of, particularly young people to visit it, but very small numbers” (P34).

Half of the participants felt Ruskin Land’s educational and cultural role should grow, but acknowledged the area would need to be developed more for that, including making it more accessible. Participants acknowledged this to be in tension with the desire to keep the space, especially its nature, unspoiled. Three participants expressed concern over this. The word “balance” was used by one to suggest how this should be done, but there was uncertainty as to how to keep it:

> I was thinking if it was more accessible, that would mean more cars! ‘Cause people wouldn’t walk it. So, I don’t know what I think about that really, there’s a balance to be had, between the sustainability and accessibility as well. And I don’t know where you draw that line. (P10)

One participant admitted to feeling protective towards Ruskin Land: “. . . I care about what happens there and want to try and make sure that we are doing what

we should be doing to ... be as environmentally friendly as we can, while also being good for humanity and society" (P34). This participant was worried that increased visitor numbers would mean "undermining the peaceful tranquillity that would've been part of what Ruskin actually prized about it in the first place" (P34).

Two participants did not seem to give thought to how accessibility would impact the nature and ambience of Ruskin Land. They thought that accessibility and more people were what the place needed to continue to exist:

> P11: It needs accessibility. To have any form of impact . . .. Road. Physical road.
>
> P12: There's no point in informing people that it's there because they can't get there.
>
> P11: They don't go there and they can't get there and they don't like getting there. (P11, P12)

The last theme, Ruskin Land as example, appeared in three participants' responses. One saw it as "an example of what could be done elsewhere" on how nature can be used for physical and mental health (P1). Two commented on the way it was being run along the lines of a sustainable land management operation with community involvement and the potential of that being recognised nationally or internationally: "What's really important I think, is to link, to use Ruskin Land and the surrounding forest as a model for how woodland can be sustainably managed for nature and economic benefit in the long run in the UK" (P27).

Attitudes to Nature

How do members of this group see their relationship with nature?

Questions concerning participants' attitudes to nature elicited answers on their enjoyment of the natural world and importance of having access to it, as well as opinions on what a proper way of looking after it involves. Here, the concept of a "working forest" appears (a term used by two members of this group). Participants also revealed what they understood by the word "sustainability," sometimes before being directly asked for a definition.

Most participants expressed an interest in nature before being asked about this directly. The interest was both personal and professional. Half of all

participants considered their interest lifelong and a result of childhood spent enjoying the outdoors. Three commented on nature's therapeutic qualities, for example: ". . . being able to be actually hands on with earth and plants has [a beneficial effect] on people who are going through a difficult time, maybe permanently, maybe only temporarily. [People] need time in an open space" (P1). Two of the three participants admitted they themselves did not feel quite right if not allowed access to the Wyre or other green areas: "I find my own . . . mental well-being is *much* better if I manage to spend a bit of time every day outside" (P10).

One participant believed that nature needed to be treated with respect:

> I still think it's the fundamental resource in life and I think we need to be more, as a society, we need to be better connected with nature, we need to show it more respect and give it, work more in harmony with natural processes. (P27)

Seven participants considered it human duty to look after nature. Three used the word "steward" or "stewardship" to describe that duty and included Ruskin in their discussion of what this should involve. One explained:

> I suppose, very importantly, we have a responsibility for nature. That's to say if we don't look after it, we will lose it, or it will go out of control and take over the world in such a way to make it unliveable in. So it depends on us to care for it. And I think that's the essence of what Ruskin has to say about nature: that we are stewards. (P28)

In practice, this means deciding whether it is

> . . . best to just let all the trees grow on and let nature take its course as it wants to . . . or whether good stewardship and ethical management of the land in Ruskinian terms might actually mean that you chop down some of the trees and allow for greater biodiversity to happen. (P34)

One participant felt confident that having Ruskin's philosophy behind the work of the WCLT ensured that the landscape would be properly looked after. To them, Ruskin Land was more than just a "piece of natural architecture," but rather a working landscape that needed to be worked in a "balanced" way (P1). Those participants who also considered the Wyre a "working landscape" tended to use

the term “management” rather than “stewardship.” One explained that the Forest was as a “semi-natural ancient woodland” that had been used for centuries for wood production (P20). According to them, the Wyre Forest “. . . has been allowed to be unmanaged . . . since the 1930s, 1940s . . .. The open areas and standard trees and the new coppice growth has become a bit unbalanced. So the idea is try and get it back to working forest that it was” (P20). This requires cutting down trees and one participant was critical of local residents’ opposition to this: “all that’s rubbish, because the Forest has to be managed in order to sustain it for future generations” (P18).

The word “balance” also appeared in participants’ discussions of sustainability, a term, according to one participant, “Ruskin would have understood” (P28). The same participant believed that

> Our relationship with nature has to be a balanced one. We have to be aware that the world is an organism and, just as if you’re looking after a garden, or looking after a child, you have to think of the needs of that organism, you can’t simply do what you want with it, exploit it for your own benefit. You’ve got to think of its benefit as well. (P28)

When asked for a definition of sustainability, most participants provided a variation of responsible use of resources as definition. One added “not polluting” to this (P1), while another made it about everyday individual choices such as “not buying carrier bags, re-using as much as I can and buying my clothes from charity shops” (P10).

Below is a word cloud made using NVivo. It is included here as a visual representation of the 50 words used by members of this group most often across the three themes. I set the query to include words with a minimum 3-letter length, I excluded pronouns, pause words (for example, “well”), names. I ran the query only on the participants’ responses rather than both those and interview questions, as the questions contained many words that I felt could distort the results (for example, “Ruskin,” “land,” “community”). All subsequent clouds in this chapter were created following the same principles.

Fig. 9. Case Study 1 word cloud of 50 most-used words across all themes, screenshot from NVivo 11 Pro.

The word cloud in Fig. 9. shows that "Ruskin" was the most mentioned word by this group with "people" and "land" coming second, perhaps because the name "Ruskin Land" was used by participants quite often. The word "guild," although quite distinct, is less visible than "nature" or "forest" and on par with "sustainable," "community" and "involvement" which invites speculation about the importance of Guild membership to this group of participants.

Case Study 2 WCLT Board Members and Employees

Attitudes to Ruskin

What is their relationship with John Ruskin and his thought?

While discussing their feelings towards Ruskin prior to and after becoming involved at Ruskin Land, this group also revealed opinions on the relevance of Ruskin's thought to their work in the Wyre. Participants were also asked for their opinion on the Ruskin trio of "pure Air, Water, and Earth."

Five out of 8 participants in this group had heard of Ruskin before becoming involved at Ruskin Land, either through their interest the Arts and Crafts Movement

or the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. One had heard of Ruskin because of their interest in socialist politics when younger and, once reacquainted with some of his ideas at Ruskin Land, thought they sounded "sensible" (P4). Ruskin's ideas "resonated" with two participants (P4, P35). All participants felt that their understanding of Ruskin deepened through their work at Ruskin Land, one remarking that "being here, you can't help but learn little bits about him and about the sort of person he was and people that he's inspired" (P22). One participant had to learn a lot about Ruskin to be able to pass it on to visitors in the duration of the *Ruskin in Wyre* project. Although half of the participants were interested in Ruskin's connection to the Wyre and happy that Ruskin Land had such "time depth" (P9), only one admitted to having read some of Ruskin's own work. That same person added that they had other priorities than reading a lot of Ruskin, however, "that's not to say that I don't really enjoy the involvement I have with it, and it has certainly broadened my cultural understanding and connections that he made around the craftsmanship stuff and the understanding of nature" (P35). One participant jokingly remarked that "life's too short" to read Ruskin (P4). Still, two participants claimed that at Ruskin Land, "we're trying to live and work by his philosophies" (P21) and that "the values of Ruskin [are] underpinning it all" (P23).

In discussing their work at Ruskin Land, one participant found Ruskin's ideas "not relevant" in the twenty-first century and commented on the need to be modern (P4), while another provided an explanation of what this means and what the Ruskinian principles are: "Ruskin had the idea of this place supporting a community [and we are] enacting his ideals. We've got the same aspiration, but doing that in a contemporary way" (P9). This participant expressed tentative belief that this work was in accordance with Ruskin's intentions: "I don't know if Ruskin would approve that ... He probably would have done" (P9).

Faced with the Ruskinian trio of "pure Air, Water, and Earth," four participants felt that the list was missing something. Three out of the four said these were emotions or human relationships with one adding that on a physical level, an energy component was missing, for example fire. One participant declared the trio "too simplistic," because people needed an income too (P19). In contrast with that, one participant believed that humans are equipped with everything

necessary to make a success of life if they have those three basic elements: "We have intelligence and we have resilience, we have innovation, we have creativity. If we've got a clean environment, we can create the things that we need to be happy and to live" (P35). Three other participants expressed a similar belief in being able to live with just the three, with one person saying that it was easy to lose sight of what was truly necessary in life:

> I think a lot of people nowadays consider other things to be more important, like technology and phones, and I think people spend way too much time doing things like using things like that, and I think people forget that you can easily live just with those three things and happily, live a happy life, you don't need all the other stuff to live. (P21)

One participant saw the Ruskinian three as being in accordance with what they understood as Ruskin's "philosophy of getting people out of the cities [and helping] people to get out into open space, open air, appreciate nature" (P23) and saw Ruskin Land as being able to provide that. Less optimistically, one participant commented that due to the pollution of the Earth, we did not have any of the three "pure" at the moment (P23).

Attitudes to Ruskin Land

How do they see Ruskin Land and its function?

Within this theme, there were two main topics: the uniqueness of Ruskin Land as both a space and a project and Ruskin Land's role in the community and as a community. Side topics were Ruskin Land's educational role and the consequences of the area's growing popularity.

Participants were in agreement that Ruskin Land was a beautiful area, with half branding it that or "lovely" (for example, P25), with one adding "peaceful" (P4) and two remarking that it also had something intangible and "special" about it: ". . . there's a special feeling that you get from being here in Ruskin Land which is hard to explain, you have to sort of come and experience it" (P22). Because of that, being at Ruskin Land could be beneficial to people's mental health, as one participant stated: "we've got lots of stories of volunteers, of major health benefits

of people having been here and been with other people and working outside" (P23).

Seven participants saw it as special or "unique" in terms of the way it was run. Things said included: "unique, innovative and different. It's something that hasn't been done anywhere else" (P35); WCLT were "pioneers" (P4) or a "unique organisation" (P21) and Ruskin Land a "landscape experiment" that has not "been done in the UK" (P9). Three participants said that Ruskin Land was attractive to visitors because of the Ruskinian backstory: "it is sometimes the stories about the land and the stories they can tell you which make the land more special" (P22). Also the offer of activities for visitors was considered original:

> . . . getting people here, getting them to work with their hands, getting them to learn the stories of the past, it brings a different role than just being a plain Visitors' Centre with a café and a child play area and a car park and somewhere to walk the dog. (P22)

And: ". . . [the Ruskin in Wyre project has] definitely helped reconnect people back to the land, and back to working with tools and making things from objects that've been harvested through the management of the Forest" (P21). An added benefit of that was Ruskin Land's role in educating people, especially young, about nature and training in rural crafts: they learn "very general basic things about being outside, being in the environment, and hopefully some of those messages start to rub off" (P23).

The word "management" was used by 5 out of the 8 participants to refer to how Ruskin Land was being looked after. Participants saw it as having potential to be an example to others: "It shows other landowners . . . an appropriate way of managing a forest and it might inspire other landowners to do the same" (P19) and

> . . . because there hasn't been close industrialisation, there's not a lot of people . . . demanding to live in the Forest to cut it down, [so] we can ensure that we make this an example of how to manage woodlands well. Which can then be promoted elsewhere. (P25)

Four participants saw Ruskin Land as a community in itself—"a nice family" (P21)—and impacting the wider community:

> . . .when you start adding up the number of people that are directly involved in Ruskin Land now, it's probably about 120-150, but if you look at the influence Ruskin Land has on the immediate and the wider community, it's beginning to get a lot of traction. (P9)

Two participants were hopeful about WCLT's new role as a cooperative or as a promoter of closer cooperation, especially among Wyre landowners. One remarked: "In the rural sector, generally, . . . we're not terribly renowned for collaboration. So, what we're doing through the Land Trust, is quite unique, getting landowners to collaborate with each other" (P4).

Although getting more people involved was an aspiration, four participants also acknowledged the need to do it carefully, without compromising the landscape in the process: "you can't invite lots of people down to admire how wonderful it is without actually impacting it" (P25). Two used the motto "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" in this context: "when we sort of push on the beautiful, fruitful, peaceful, it's a balance, to keep those things" (P4) and:

> I think there's always going to be a challenge on Ruskin Land, between public access and "beautiful, peaceful, fruitful" being retained. And we've got to retain the "beautiful, peaceful, fruitful" in everything we do, because otherwise you spoil the asset anyway. (P23)

<u>Attitudes to Nature</u>

How do members of this group see their relationship with nature?

Here, participants discussed their understanding of the word "sustainability" as well as their interest in nature and opinions as to how that should be looked at, especially at Ruskin Land.

Seven out of 8 participants declared an interest in nature with 6 revealing that they became involved in the work of the WCLT because of that. All 6 had an appreciation of nature's importance, also on their well-being, with one stating: "if I didn't live in an area where I felt part of nature, I'd feel like I'd quietly die" (P25). Five participants had previous professional experience in conservation work. One participant described themselves as a "restorer" and "steward": "We've got a very

benign and supportive landowner in the Guild . . . so we can steward [Ruskin Land] very carefully and hopefully, do something very good here" (P4).

The vast majority of participants saw the work at Ruskin Land as "management" and the landscape as requiring intervention: "I think what a lot of people don't appreciate about this Forest is that it's not *natural,* it's all been managed and as the decades and centuries have gone by, mankind has managed it for different reasons" (P4). Wyre is a landscape that requires waking up: "It's not a natural landscape in any sense, it's completely man-manipulated, and has been for hundreds of years. So what we're trying to do, is bring it alive and give it new energy again" and the benefit of that is that the WCLT "are beginning to make the landscape pay and work" (P9). Two participants called the forest an "asset," with one using the word repeatedly throughout the interview, for example: ". . . what we hope to do in Ruskin Land . . . is to do some woodland management . . ., we've been able to experiment . . . with the asset, improve the asset for the Guild" (P23).

The word "manage" also appeared in definitions of sustainability participants provided during the interviews. Dominant understanding was as sensible use of natural resources and leaving something "for future generations" (P4, P23, P35).

The word "balance" again appeared in two responses, for example:

> Ultimately, it's about trying to find a balance between [the three components of sustainability]. Again, underpinned by, first and foremost, . . . environmental sustainability. Because without it, there isn't an economy, and without it, in the long term, . . . there isn't going to be a society. (P35)

Four participants connected their definitions of sustainability to WCLT's work at Ruskin Land:

> . . . trying not to exhaust natural resources, trying to work in balance with nature, so use what you can without having a negative effect on the ecosystems going forward . . . also from our business point of view, we need to be sustainable and need to make sure . . . we cover our bases and cover our costs, so that we can continue as a business, here. (P22)

And: "I'd like to see [Ruskin Land] continue to be managed in a sustainable way" (P19). One participant added the view that to create a sustainable society on Earth, individual action was necessary, including lobbying the governments (P25).

Below is a word cloud made using NVivo. It is included here as a visual representation of the 50 words used by members of this group most often across the three themes.

Fig. 10. Case Study 2 word cloud of 50 most-used words across all themes, screenshot from NVivo 11 Pro.

The word cloud illustrates how prominent the word “working” is in this group’s responses. “Management” also stands out, although “asset” did not make the list. “People” and a smaller “community” could be taken to demonstrate the participants’ perception of Ruskin Land project as for and reliant on, involvement from the community. “Sustainably” and “nature” are also noticeable words and so is “guild,” the last comparable in size to the same word in the word cloud for Case Study 1 (Fig. 9.).

Case Study 3 WCLT Volunteers (Subgroups: Woodworks and Conservation)

Attitudes to Ruskin

What is their relationship with John Ruskin and his thought?

Four out of 7 conservation volunteers had heard of Ruskin before becoming involved with Ruskin Land and one immediately declared themselves in favour of his thought and its application at Ruskin Land: "I'd heard of Ruskin, read some of his books and been very impressed by the work he was doing many years ago. And it's lovely to see it being revived in Wyre" (P24). Both they and two others commented on the gap between Ruskinian theory and practice, also in Ruskin himself:

> I can see how his ideals caught, could capture people's imagination. They are ideals and they don't always work in practice for everyone, so it's got to be very special and dedicated people, who are going to give up comfortable lifestyles to live the sort of ideals he had for self-sustainability. (P24)

In a similar spirit, Participants 29 and 30 saw Ruskin as a "visionary," but not "a doer": "Bit of a philosopher, he came up with the right ideas and the right concept, but actually putting it to practice … Maybe wasn't too keen to get his hands dirty?" (P29). These two participants also stressed that he needed to be placed within the context of his times to be properly understood and that his ideas needed adapting to twenty-first century problems:

> We've global warming going on, and that's going to affect how woodlands and fields and rivers and everything else changes over time, quite apart from what *we* might choose to do to it. And I think that may be something that you maybe have to modify his, Ruskin's views in this day and age. (P30)

One more participant considered Ruskin's applicability now: "If you've got the story from the past and you're trying to go into the future, how do you resolve the tensions between them, 'cause of different things involved. And which one's seen to be the one that's more important?" (P32). That same participant reflected on what Ruskin's Guild of St. George was. In their view,

> . . . the whole idea of St. George itself gives you almost an Anglo-centric perception of the world. And today's world should be more international and global. And George himself wasn't necessarily just British, if you look at his heritage . . .. (P32)

Faced with the Ruskinian trio "pure Air, Water, and Earth," two participants missed the energy of "fire" (P32) or "light" (P2) from the list. Two participants saw human relationships as missing. One person compared the trio to Maslow's hierarchy of needs: "starting with the physical at the base, then yeah, absolutely. You can't really add or detract from that, because without clean water, clean air people can't… And what do you call living as well" they added implying that quality of life was important too (P30). To one participant it was important to remember that everything in life and nature was connected:

> Yes, you need good clean air, good clean water and good clean earth. But then, you also need to understand how they all connect to each other and how we can live in harmony with the air and water and nature that comes out of those. You can't just look at those three and think that's what you need, a, b, and c. (P33)

Most woodworking volunteers had heard the name Ruskin before becoming involved, but admitted to not having known any details of the man or his thought. Four out of nine in this set felt they expanded their knowledge since coming to Ruskin Land, two through some research of their own. Those two had attended Ruskin events organised at Ruskin Land and one of those participants believed that the educational and training offer at Ruskin Land was inspired by Ruskin's thought: ". . . the Guild . . . has done educational courses and run seminars on it, we've been to a couple of those, they do training courses with dry oak, whether it's hedge-laying or wildlife, et cetera, which is ran along Ruskin's lines" (P17). One other participant attempted to interpret Ruskin's intentions for Ruskin Land: "So there's a community there. I'm not sure Ruskin would… Well, Ruskin probably would've approved" (P6). That same participant, however, admitted to not being clear on what the Ruskinian connection meant exactly, although they claimed to feel positive about it: "I don't really understand but I like it, sitting there" (P6). Similar uncertainty was expressed by one more person who had trouble understanding the aims of the WCLT:

> I think the adjectives are not always clear, as to what the overarching objective of the Trust is. I think that gets a bit cloudy from time to time. I

> think it varies. Sometimes you get the feeling that there is a mission, if you like, a clear objective. And other times you think we're muddling through a bit and we don't… we're kind of going from day to day, week to week. I don't get a sense, I'm sure there must be, but I don't get a sense of an overall, of an overarching plan. (P15)

Only one participant confessed to their complete lack of interest in Ruskin or the connection he had to Ruskin Land.

All nine participants said they got involved with Ruskin Land because it was important to them to be able to do practical, creative work with wood and make beautiful, useful objects. One person linked this to Ruskin: "It's a traditional, real Ruskin stuff, oak. It rings of Ruskin I think" (P6).

Asked for their opinion on the Ruskinian trio of "pure Air, Water, and Earth," four participants agreed that this is what people needed with one remarking that economic sustainability was necessary too. Two people linked the trio to current environmental problems with one saying:

> Things are becoming more and more polluted, even in ways you don't know. I mean, the climate change will start to affect people in quite big way in the next few decades. I think people need to sort of step back a bit and get back to doing things a bit more sustainably than they have done. (P14)

Two participants declared the view "too limited" and only a beginning of what people need, pointing out that there was a difference between needs and wants. One participant, echoing what a conservation volunteer had said wondered what it actually meant to live. Their view was that:

> We need many more things and life is better if you have many more things. Life is not about having only things, but they're important. Ability to travel, to live… There are a lot more things that are important than just being able to survive. You can survive on those three, but life is better if you do more than just surviving. (P8)

There was one participant who saw the Ruskinian trio as "philosophising": "I'm not trying to be flippant or anything like that, but obviously I have to think about other things and I… Yeah, pure air, yeah… I need a bit more than that" (P13).

Attitudes to Ruskin Land

How do they see Ruskin Land and its function?

All woodworking volunteers commented on the importance of the social side of Ruskin Land. This was as important to them as being able to do practical, creative work: "I came to treat it as work, now I come 'cause there's a bunch of guys I like having a laugh and a joke with" (P13). And, ". . . we just have a laugh, just do some stuff and… It's more of a social thing I suppose, for us lads" (P16). Others mentioned the sense of "comradeship" and being able to "banter" (P6), and the opportunity to be active and social in retirement: "It's a privilege for me, as a retired chap, to come and work, with these guys, in the community. And do something practical in the wild. It's great" (P5).

Five participants also saw Ruskin Land as a place where things can be learnt and skills acquired, both by the volunteers themselves—also through learning from each other—and others: "We've all learnt new skills in doing this, just in cutting the wood and getting it to fit together properly. So it looks like a professional job" (P14). And: "I think this Guild, this Trust, has a lot to offer. To people like me, who want to learn something, who want to spend nice time, do something useful" (P8). Another participant seconded the view that people who want to learn, could come to Ruskin Land: "It should be accessible. It should be… it should broaden the scope just beyond the volunteers, it should allow other people in to experience what it's got and so that other people can learn the same as we're learning" (P15).

Four participants discussed the benefits of working with your hands for children and young people. It could be work experience, but also an opportunity to see that one has the power to create something: "It almost brings tears to your eyes watching. . . . We had some kids [here]. And they *made* something. Out of wood, we made a bench" (P6).

Ruskin Land is also a place where children who struggle at school could experience a different type of learning: ". . . there are some kids . . . who just don't like classrooms. And the farm they've got there, it's back to nature, back to animals, feeding animals, being outside the classroom… It's transformational for them. Brilliant" (P6).

Conservation volunteers shared the woodworkers' opinion that Ruskin Land has an educational role, but to them it was more to do with learning about history and caring for the environment. They also believed Ruskin Land could be used as an example of good land management.

All seven people interviewed saw Ruskin Land as a place where people of all ages can learn about local history and the environment: "[Ruskin Land] keeps history alive and it also gives people idea about how Ruskin Land was managed in the past and how we're following those ideals into the future" (P24); and "the more people that get involved in the Community Land Trust and in things that happen at Ruskin Land, then the more understanding there'll be about the way that the Forest generally is managed" (P2). Another said that Ruskin Land

> . . . has the power to be an education space for the community. At various levels. By its physical level, but also by allowing for emotional engagement through creativity and just by the fact it exists for a space to engage with people, allows a dynamic and conversation to develop. (P32)

One participant saw Ruskin Land as an example to others: ". . . it is a small part [of the Wyre Forest], but nevertheless, it's an opportunity to show what can be done in a small area. And certainly we're trying to make the Forest more productive again" (P30). One volunteer felt that places such as Ruskin Land had a duty to educate and reconnect people with nature, because

> . . . there's so many people out there that have no real connection to nature apart from maybe their lovely mown grass, a few border plants and looking at all these lovely documentaries on TV. But actually getting the word out as to why is nature so important and how it all interconnects and so how doing one thing you may think, 'Well, it's only gonna hurt that.' But actually, it's not, it's hurting everything throughout that chain further on. (P33)

Two participants also commented on what they themselves learnt at Ruskin Land: the variety in nature and the need to actively look after it. One said:

> You suddenly realise how many amazing species there are around . . . If you're just going for a walk yourself, you think 'Oh there's lots of pretty butterflies,' but you don't actually realise how rare some of them are. And

the different food plants they might need and what you can do to help those improve. (P30)

Attitudes to Nature

How do members of this group see their relationship with nature?

Within this theme, participants talked about their feelings towards nature, especially in the Wyre Forest, their understanding of the word "sustainability" and their concerns over the state of the environment. Answers across both groups were very similar.

All 16 participants but one declared a love of nature and an interest in and valuing of the Wyre Forest. Some were very emphatic: "I think if somebody cut me through the middle, I would have the Wyre Forest written all the way through. Wyre Forest to me is like a part of me" (P2); "I go into the Forest particularly with a great sense of wonder for the beauty and awe of the wild places" (P24).

Six participants highlighted the importance of access to green spaces such as the Wyre giving three reasons: recreational, mental health and learning to value the environment. From the point of view of recreation, the Wyre Forest was seen by one participant as being ". . . very valuable . . .. I used to come here when I didn't live quite so close. I used to come to the Wyre Forest either to walk, or cycle, or whatever, and it's important that we have these sort of spaces really" (P15). Nature's importance for mental health was recognised by three participants because, as one said, "the fact that a tree's been there for three hundred years and you're struggling say from one week to the next, it's like kind of a softening of the harshness maybe of everyday rhythm" (P32). Another added that being in nature, even if it is an urban park, helps "people maintain their sanity in this rather mad world. There's nothing better, than going for a walk. . . . Super, super way of… readjusting your thoughts back to that which you perceive to be important" (P5). One participant linked their well-being to the Wyre: "If I don't get out into the Forest at least once a week, I feel that something withers in my soul" (P2).

Access to green spaces was also important to participants who worried about the growing separation between people and nature:

> The Forest tends to be used as a big playground and people will come and they'll walk their dogs, they will ride their bikes, they'll ride horses through. But, I don't think they are really *looking* at the Forest as a whole. They're not seeing it holistically. It's just somewhere to come and play and that concerns me, because, as time goes on, the people are becoming more and more… divorced, separated from the natural world, particularly children. (P2)

Expressing similar views, three participants had a conversation about the problem of, what they called, "sanitisation" of nature. Things like "stepping in a cowpat" (P31) are supposed to be part of what the countryside is:

> I think it's really important that people get the chance also just to come out and see the landscape as it actually is, rather than, say, on *Countryfile*-style sort of [cleanliness]. You need to be able to see it, smell it, touch it and really get involved with it. (P30)

Sustainability was generally understood by participants as a responsible use of resources, also in the Wyre. One participant said that,

> It's important that whatever we do here doesn't affect the viability of the Forest as a whole. It's important that whatever we are taking out, whether it be oak or whatever, it is being replaced. . . . The impression I get is, whatever [WCLT] do, is part of that. (P15)

This view was seconded by another: WCLT's activity at Ruskin Land "protects the woodland for the future" (P16). While talking about what sustainability meant to them, seven participants expressed concerns over the state of the planet and talked about making the right choices, for example:

> We're all, those of us who care for the Planet, are really very, very concerned about sustainability and how we can make our communities more sustainable in their use of materials, their type of communications, travel, that kind of thing. But also, changing people's perspectives about how they can reuse and recycle materials, how they could use less petrol, etc. (P24)

Participants agreed that changes in our way of living were necessary: "At the moment, we're well exceeding what the planet can naturally provide with. So, we've got to cut back on our consumption. Just adjust the way we live really" (P14).

Two participants felt it was down to personal choices of "satisfying our own needs for food, shelter, et cetera. And doing it in a way where waste products are going through compost toilets, reed beds, not polluting with toxic things the environment, and so on" (P5) or eating organically (P13). One was opposed to taking individual action: "I'm not doing this on an individual level, but I am supporting all ideas that promote it on the country, continental level. So we can work all together to share the responsibilities, to keep the world going" (P8). One participant believed that individual action is necessary, but for best results, there has to be coercion from the government as this seems to work well in Britain: "I think sometimes you need sticks, don't you, a bit like the London Congestion Charge. Sometimes you just gotta say, "This is how it's gonna be, get on with it" (P30).

Below is a word cloud made using NVivo. It is included here as a visual representation of the 50 words used by members of this group most often across the three themes.

Fig. 11. Case Study 3 word cloud of 50 most-used words across all themes, screenshot from NVivo 11 Pro.

This word cloud differs from the clouds made for the other two participant groups: the word “Ruskin” is about third in size after “people,” “forest,” and “works.” This shows that Ruskin, although mentioned by participants, was not of first importance to them at Ruskin Land. It was the social aspect of involvement there, illustrated by the word “people” (supported by smaller “volunteers” and “community”), that took precedence. The Wyre “Forest” was important to participants in this group, as well as “nature,” “sustainable” and “look,” although “making” was a close second to “nature.” The 50 words used most by members of all groups combined and across all the three themes can be seen in the final NVivo word cloud below.

Fig. 12. Word cloud of 50 most-used words by participants from all three Case Studies and across all the three themes, screenshot from NVivo 11 Pro.

The most prominent word across all groups and themes is “people,” surpassing even “Ruskin” and “land” which occurred often in the interviews if only because Ruskin Land was a name mentioned repeatedly. “Works” and “forest,” closely followed by “nature,” show that discussions of nature and the Wyre were prevalent in the interviews, “sustainable,” “community,” “making” and “living” together form the next tier of frequency and express certain Ruskinian principles.

Discussion

This study was designed to answer the question of what motivates the people of Ruskin Land to work and look after nature together if it is not the need to support their livelihoods from the land. I hoped that the study would shed light on how my participants, in their groups, understood their roles in the Ruskin Land project, including their relationship with the values of community and concern for its environment, as well as attitudes towards John Ruskin. In my interview, questions 2, 4, 6 and 9 were designed to elicit answers regarding attitudes towards Ruskin;

questions 2, 4, 8 and 9, towards community; and, 5 to 8, towards nature or sustainability. Questions 1, 3, 10 and 11 were auxiliary questions.

I anticipated I would get slightly different results from each of my three participant groups and I had certain expectations towards each of them. In this section of the chapter, I use what I found out in the course of the study to answer my research questions. I discuss the results I obtained for each case study as well as across cases and give my interpretation of the data. The Discussion section is followed by Reflexivity and Limitations of the study where I talk about other lessons learned from the study.

Case Study 1 Guild of St. George Companions

I anticipated that participants who were Companions of the Guild of St. George would take a stand on Ruskin, Ruskin's ideas in general and his plans for Bewdley in particular. Six out of 11 Participants in this group became Companions of the Guild through their association with Ruskin Land, 3 through their connection to Bewdley and through this, to Ruskin Land, 2 had been Companions before becoming involved with Ruskin Land. I thought that participants who were Companions before becoming involved at Ruskin Land might talk about how that shaped their thinking about Ruskin. I hoped that participants who became Companions after becoming involved at Ruskin Land might explain what in Ruskin attracted them to Guild membership, as it is not obligatory for those who come to Ruskin Land. Most of all, I was curious to see if Ruskin mattered at Ruskin Land. This did not have to come through direct acknowledgement: I was curious if participants would express feelings or opinions towards nature and community that could be associated with Ruskin.

The Attitudes to Ruskin theme revealed that interest in Ruskin's thought varies among Companions living at or around Ruskin Land. No participant was completely uncritical of Ruskin and his thought, which seemed to offer sufficient variety for all participants to find something for themselves in it. Especially relatable seemed to be Ruskin's social thought and his opinions on art and crafts and most participants expressed beliefs in the importance of creativity and making things, close looking, and access to nature and beauty for all people. Not all participants

felt the need to actively expand their knowledge of Ruskin. It seemed that these who did not, believed that information they gained through Guild events was more than sufficient. Whether they admitted an active interest in Ruskin or not, Companions from Ruskin Land believed his thought should be disseminated at and beyond Ruskin Land. Two participants who were the most laconic about their interest in Ruskin, seemed the most adamant about spreading the word. In terms of what aspects of Ruskin should be promoted in Bewdley, it seems that Ruskin Land was to be used as an example of good practice. Considering participants' uniform approval of and pride in how Ruskin Land was being used and looked after, it can be assumed that this is what they had in mind when talking about keeping Ruskin involved in Bewdley. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all participants expressed strong positive feelings about nature, especially of the Wyre Forest, and about the need for sustainability, including economic sustainability, in and beyond the Forest. Bewdley Companions seemed to identify more with the WCLT than the Guild, perhaps because their membership in the latter came about through involvement with the former, especially through friendship with John and Linda Iles or WCLT directors.

The Attitudes to Ruskin Land theme shows that the space's main function was seen to be educational in several ways. Firstly, by allowing people access to nature and teaching them about it, so that they would learn to value it and, in turn, want to look after it. Secondly, through arts and crafts-themed events at Ruskin Land, teaching people to be creative, or allowing them to be creative. Ruskin Land was also seen as having potential to educate the locals in the history of their community. Lastly, as mentioned above, Ruskin Land could be an example to others and used to teach people how to properly look after land: meadows, orchards and woodland. One participant mentioned the Ruskin Land motto "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" to discuss the role Ruskin Land could have in demonstrating how land could be made "fruitful" while retaining the other two. Without quite acknowledging the motto, four other participants called Ruskin Land "beautiful" (P18) or "peaceful" (P3, P26, P34), especially while expressing a worry over its potential increased popularity and ensuing loss of these attributes. Participants saw the need to keep things in "balance" at Ruskin Land.

The Attitudes to nature theme demonstrated that all participants in this group felt strongly positive towards nature with 7 seeing it as the main reason they became involved at Ruskin Land and with 3 out of the 7 seeing it as their entry point to Ruskin as well. It was their desire to look after nature that drew them both to Ruskin and Ruskin Land, and 5 out of all 11 participants expressed deep concern over the state of the environment. Proper ways of caring for the land, especially that at Ruskin Land, were discussed by 8 participants and in this context, the word "manage" was used by 7 and "steward" by 2 (one person used both words). Participants in this group also discussed nature's therapeutic qualities and one felt that there was a need for Ruskin Land to be more inclusive in providing access to nature beyond a certain class or ethnicity.

Case Study 2 WCLT board members and employees

I wondered if participants in this group would have a more pragmatic and applied, rather than theoretical Ruskinian, attitude to Ruskin Land. Out of the 8 participants in this group, 5 were Companions of the Guild, but they joined after becoming involved at Ruskin Land. Therefore, I assumed that what drew them to Ruskin Land was firstly their interest in the environment—and expected to hear a lot on this topic accordingly—and, secondly, community. I anticipated that participants in this group would use more specialised language to describe their work at Ruskin Land—words such as "manage"—as I had heard them use this kind of language throughout the time I had been visiting Bewdley. I was curious if any kind of shared organisational ethos would be articulated by participants in this group.

The Attitudes to Ruskin theme revealed that those participants who were WCLT directors and Companions learned most of what they knew about Ruskin from the Guild and did not seem to seek to learn more on their own unless it was seen as necessary for their work at Ruskin Land. The one non-Companion director expressed an interest in Ruskin and so did one Companion who was not involved with the WCLT anymore. WCLT staff were new to Ruskin when they first became involved at Ruskin Land and it is difficult to judge to what extent their current understanding of him came through some form of study and how much by being surrounded by this information at Ruskin Land or because it was seen as necessary:

one remarked “being here, you can’t help but learn” (P22). In both groups, practical, especially environmental, work at Ruskin Land was seen as a priority over reading Ruskin, while at the same time Ruskinian “philosophies” (P21) or “values” (P23) were declared as being at the root of that work. Two participants were quick to add that Ruskin Land was a modern interpretation of Ruskin’s thought and one seemed desirous of Ruskin’s approval of that. It is perhaps unsurprising, given most of this group’s keen interest in environmental work that they felt strongly about the need for sustainability and provided informed definitions of the word.

The Attitudes to Ruskin Land theme answers were abundant in enthusiasm for the work of the WCLT with 7 out of 8 participants calling it “special” or “unique.” WCLT at Ruskin Land was praised for creating a community, restoring the landscape and demonstrating that the land can be used productively while being also a haven for people and fauna and flora. This is the premise of the “beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful” motto purposefully used by two participants (both Guild Companions) to discuss Ruskin Land policies. This group of participants highlighted Ruskin Land’s role as an example to others and a place of learning. Answers revealed a specific pragmatic attitude to Ruskin Land and its value—it was seen as an “asset” by one that should be improved to bring income through “management.” This word was generally used to describe what the WCLT was doing at Ruskin Land with only one person also using the word “steward” or “stewardship.” The use of the word “management” was prevalent also when participants discussed their opinions of nature.

The Attitudes to nature theme showed that the deciding factor in becoming involved with Ruskin Land was, for 7 out of 8 participants, their interest in nature, both personal and professional. Unsurprisingly then, participants revealed informed, and strong, opinions on sustainability and often linked this to their work at Ruskin Land. Participants in this group often used the term “working forest” to refer to the Wyre. Participants used it to describe its history as a resource to generations of local people and used that argument to explain why their work at Ruskin Land was positive.

Case Study 3 WCLT Volunteers (woodworks and conservation)

This group of participants was one that I had spent the least time with over the course of research for this thesis. There was some contact and conversations, but in much less depth than with the other participants. Thus, I was looking forward to giving this group a chance to voice their opinions on Ruskin, and Ruskin Land and their work there. I wondered to what extent answers given by the woodworking group would differ from those obtained from conservation volunteers—I anticipated the second group would have stronger views on nature for example. I was curious to find out if Ruskin mattered at all to both groups' involvement at Ruskin Land and to what extent Guild and WCLT messages (or principles, or mission) filtered down to this group and, again, if it mattered?

The Attitudes to Ruskin theme revealed that Ruskin, be it familiarity with him or interest in his thought, mattered much less to woodworking volunteers than those involved in conservation. Although some admitted having heard of him, most woodworkers did not see knowledge of Ruskin necessary to their involvement at Ruskin Land. Despite that, almost all woodworkers expressed a (unacknowledged) Ruskinian desire to be creative and appreciation of creativity and ability to make beautiful, useful things. Conservation volunteers seemed more interested in Ruskin and his ideas than woodworkers, but approached them with caution. It was important to them to place Ruskin in the context of his times and point out the difficulty in applying some of his ideas, either because they were impractical or difficult for the common man, or because times and priorities have changed (for example, conservation replaced preservation as attitude to land). Most participants from both subgroups agreed that "pure Air, Water, and Earth" were important, especially in the face of our current environmental problems, although some felt it was important to differentiate between the needs and the wants or the difference between just surviving and actually living.

The Attitudes to Ruskin Land theme shows that for woodworkers, Ruskin Land was at first a place where they could do practical work and grow their skills. Over time, the social aspect of involvement there became as prominent and important. Both groups appreciated Ruskin Land's role of a place where learning was possible, both for them and others. This included things like practical training in

woodwork, as well as learning about nature and its care needs. Especially children and young people were seen as most likely to benefit from learning outside a classroom environment. Woodworking volunteers saw such learning as a chance to teach children something useful and practical instead of just theory, while conservation volunteers hoped it would help reconnect people with the natural world.

The Attitudes to nature theme showed that both groups had similarly strong and positive feelings towards the natural world and shared worries over the deteriorating state of the environment. The latter came across especially strongly when participants discussed their understanding of sustainability. Because all participants were local residents, it is not surprising that they felt very positive about the Wyre Forest, be it because of its recreational value or its importance in providing access to nature, which was seen as being beneficial for the participants' mental health.

Why then do people working and living at Ruskin Land come together to look after nature if it is not to support themselves from it? Based on all 35 participants' responses to questions 1 and 2 (How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land, and What were your reasons for getting involved?), it was revealed that for 17 of them nature, its uses and care for it was the most interesting or important aspect of Ruskin Land and their work there; art, craft or making was the most important for 10; for 3, their interest in applying Ruskin was the main reason for involvement; and 6 could be classed as other (social, recreational or health reasons).[54]

Splitting people's interests into groups is useful especially when considering their answers to question 6, opinion on the three material things needed to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." Those participants whose main interest was nature, were the most likely to take the quotation on Ruskin's trio of "pure Air, Water, and Earth" as just as it was, instead of pointing out that the human dimension was missing. This question, although perhaps the most problematic (as discussed in

[54] It has to be noted that the boundaries between these assignations overlap as participants often found new appeals in Ruskin Land after first becoming involved.

Limitations of the Study) also brought in intriguing answers on surviving vs. living. One participant dismissed the trio as something they did not have the "luxury" (P13) to wonder about when there were more pressing needs to do with survival—a thought-provoking attitude in the current debate about impending climate disaster and the survival of our species. Among those who found Ruskin's trio deficient in, what Ruskin calls "immaterial" needs (27.90), one participant mentioned freedom to live and travel, an answer that stood out particularly because it came from the only non-English participant in the study and which may have been prompted by the political climate at the time of the study (2018). This suggests that, were the study participants more ethnically diverse, answers may have been much different. Indeed, lack of ethnic, and also income diversity at Ruskin Land was what one participant considered a problem that needed addressing at Ruskin Land.

Among participants involved in every-day life or work at Ruskin Land—local to Bewdley and/or visiting Ruskin Land at least once a week, around 30 participants in total—attitudes towards Ruskin were intriguing and prompt the question of how necessary knowledge of Ruskin is at Ruskin Land. About 5 participants out of the 30 expressed a deeper interest in Ruskin. Most of the rest admitted to having had their understanding or knowledge of Ruskin enhanced through involvement at Ruskin Land (question 4), but very few through anything more than participating in Guild or WCLT events. In some cases, it was not immediately obvious whether this was a positive thing: "can't help but learn" (P22). Most surprisingly, it was Bewdley Companions, with the exception of perhaps three, who seemed ambivalent about the need to study Ruskin and appeared to gain most of their knowledge passively at Guild events in or outside Bewdley. In view of that, it is difficult to interpret the general enthusiasm among them for having Ruskin and his principles at the root of all work at Ruskin Land (and Companionship, as discussed below) and the desire to promote him.[55] Perhaps it is simply due to Ruskin's unchanging ability to inspire,

[55] It is impossible to say how many participants answered "yes" to the question about being interested in Ruskin because they felt it was expected of them as Guild Companions. Some seemed very comfortable with admitting Ruskin was difficult or not fully applicable, but some may have felt uncomfortable with that question. I am unsure to what extent my position as a Ruskin researcher asking that question may have contributed to that.

the variety he offers (something for everyone) and the need to rely on attractive soundbites (such as the motto "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful") when faced with the sheer volume and complexity of Ruskin's writings. In general, however, whether interested in Ruskin or not, Companions were the group who most often articulated the Ruskinian principles[56] of looking closely, the need for access to nature and beauty, an appreciation for art and craftsmanship and, occasionally, certain social policy beliefs that rang of Ruskin, for example, the need for fair rents and education for all.

What surprised me, particularly after reading many Guild writings, including Companions' letters, in my research for Chapter 2, was the considerably low number of musings among Companions (including those interviewed as part of the WCLT set) on what "Ruskin would have wanted." There were perhaps 4 participants in total in the study, 3 of whom were Guild Companions, who wondered about that. Companions from the beginning of the twentieth century may have felt Ruskin's absence more keenly than Companions now and were in need of some direction. Also, perhaps the further we move away in time from Ruskin's Victorian conditions, the more we are forced by our own reality and changed circumstances to adapt him to our needs. That there is still a lot in him that participants find "resonates" with them (P35) or sounds "sensible" (P4) is encouraging in terms of his long-term significance.

In the WCLT board and staff participant set, I found two results especially worth commenting on. Participants from this set were the most mixed group in terms of their position in the organisation. There were WCLT staff (paid), WCLT board members (voluntary) and WCLT board members who were Guild Companions.[57] What was striking was the shared organisational ethos or message expressed across almost all interviews in this group. I did expect a certain practical, professional attitude towards their work at Ruskin Land (putting environment first, Ruskin's thought second) and perhaps some specialised language. These were indeed present. Present was also a strikingly similar message about the importance

[56] Although rarely acknowledged by participants as such.
[57] This was also the most diverse group in terms of participants' age, but I did not find this significant for this study.

of “management” of a “working landscape” that the Wyre Forest is and the originality, or “uniqueness” of the Ruskin Land project and the WCLT as an organisation.[58] This is not to say that I found any of these in any way questionable, it is merely an observation of the number of times these words or phrases appeared and the similarity of how they were delivered. I accept that “forest management” is a term widely used across the world (for example, by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation) to describe the kind of activities the WCLT do at Ruskin Land, but, as a relative outsider to Ruskin Land, I found the frequency with which the word was used there intriguing. The message of “forest management” seemed to me repeated like a mantra, an organisation message passed down from decision-makers in the Guild and at Ruskin Land (often the same people attending the same meetings) onto staff and further down, diluted, onto the volunteers. The upbeat method of delivery, of talking about the WCLT could also be looked at here. Participants in this group were undoubtedly passionate about Ruskin Land and their work, as well as proud of what the WCLT has so far and could yet achieve—as they should be. However, I did wonder whether the upbeat tone of the delivery, as well as the desire to stress the importance of what they were doing, was not exaggerated by being asked about it in a recorded interview by an insider/outsider researcher.

In general, the most relaxed group of participants were the volunteers, who did not feel any kind of pressure to answer my questions or any awkwardness in speaking their minds, even in group interviews. Although most admitted to having heard of Ruskin—or at least his name—some had not found it necessary or interesting to find out more about him, even through attending free Guild or WCLT events at Ruskin Land. To them, the social aspect of Ruskin Land was the most important, accompanied by the possibility of pursuing their interest in either creating objects from wood, or working in close proximity to nature. Participants did not associate these interests with Ruskin, although he did emphasise the importance of close looking at nature and of having practical skills such as woodworking and appreciation of craftsmanship.

[58] A sentiment shared also by Companions most connected, personally or through work at Ruskin Land, to the WCLT.

Another result worth noting is the volunteers' relationship to the Guild and the WCLT and the message of Ruskin Land. Some volunteers were clearer on what that was than others, with an occasional repetition of the "forest management" message (4 out of 16 participants, 1 woodworker and 3 conservation). One participant felt that messages coming from the Guild were different from those coming from the WCLT, while another could not see the difference between the organisations nor an overarching message or goal at Ruskin Land. On the whole, conservation volunteers tended to be better informed about Ruskin and WCLT's vision for Ruskin Land and that may be because, in their work, they are usually accompanied by one of the WCLT team and the message might be discussed.
The final study finding relates to the message of Ruskin Land and its connection to divisions at Ruskin Land that my split into three participant groups reflects. The level of understanding of Ruskin Land aims and objectives among volunteers becomes something more worthy of consideration when my entire study population is considered. From the 35 participants, about 28 came to Ruskin Land with little or no prior knowledge of Ruskin and his thought, which suggests that the draw was in the nature or the land project rather than Ruskin. There were 16 Companion participants in the study: 2 were Guild Companions before becoming involved at Ruskin Land while 14 became Companions through their association with Ruskin Land. Out of these, 13 became Companions in Ruskin Land's latest stage, post-2004, which shows a certain effectiveness of the land, the project, or perhaps, personal relationships within Bewdley in recruitment for the Guild. The Companions set overlaps with the WCLT in terms of membership: 5 out of 8 are Companions, 2 out of the 5 are also Guild directors and so decision-makers in the Guild and at Ruskin Land. Among Companions in my study, those who are the closest to Guild directors are also the best informed of Guild and WCLT projects, aims and aspirations. Among the volunteers, there are hardly any Companions: Bewdley Companions may occasionally volunteer on jobs for the WCLT (administrative help, Bewdley Museum exhibition assistance), but it is usually not physical work and not done regularly. One exception is a Companion who is also a volunteer woodworker, but they lead their volunteer group rather than being just one of many. Distance from decision-makers within the Guild and awareness and

understanding of the Ruskin Land message are inversely proportional at Ruskin Land. The three sets of people involved at Ruskin Land could be visually represented by concentric circles, which echo Ruskin's modified vision of Guild Companionship in *Letter 63* of *Fors Clavigera*. There, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Ruskin divided membership in the Guild into three levels, depending on Companions' involvement:

1. Companions Servant, the smallest group, people devoting most of their time to the Guild;
2. Companions Militant, paid Guild workers;
3. Companions Consular, the biggest group, faithful to the Master and the Guild's objectives and supporting it with the tenth of their income, but tending to their own occupations and affairs (28.539).

Although, as already mentioned, Ruskin Land volunteers are not Guild Companions, Ruskin's division is remarkably similar to the organisation there:

1. Companions Servant could be Guild directors and WCLT directors who are also Guild Companions. These are unpaid, voluntary roles and these people devote their energy to the work of the Guild and the WCLT. In some cases, even their daily occupations seem, as Ruskin intended, secondary to the involvement in the Guild (for example, because they are retired and do not need to work).
2. Companions Militant could be WCLT staff (who fulfil the criteria of being paid and doing manual labour on the ground). These could also be Companions who get involved as occasional volunteers or event facilitators for the Guild. This could also be volunteers—although only meeting the criterion of doing manual labour.
3. Companions Consular could be Bewdley Companions who are on the fringes of involvement at Ruskin Land or who used to be actively involved, for example as Guild Directors, but have retired. They may not meet the criterion of supporting the Guild financially. Volunteers, who do not give to the Guild either, could also be considered for this group, on the virtue of being the most numerous of people involved at Ruskin Land.

Employing a different, and earlier, Ruskinian distinction, volunteers could also be compared to one type of a Guild Retainer. Mentioned in *Memorandum and Statutes of the Company of the Guild St. George* (28.377), these were people responsible for the day-to-day management of the estates. There were three categories: land agents (at Ruskin Land these could be Guild directors, and WCLT board and staff members), tenants (possibly still Ruskin Land tenants) and labourers (WCLT volunteers). Retainers were paid and were not Companions, therefore the first typology seems more fitting for Ruskin Land—and perhaps even beyond, for the whole of the Guild.

These divisions are not overtly acknowledged in the Guild and at Ruskin Land; Ruskin's original hierarchies are not enforced—but are nonetheless present. Companions Servant are the Master and Directors, Militant may be Guild employees, and Consular—the vast majority—are Companions working on small individual projects or simply largely inactive members of the Guild. Some hierarchic structure is required by law—the Guild is a UK charity and so must have a board of directors and a chairperson who, in this case, is known under the traditional name of Master. In theory, any Companion could become a Director and a Master. In practice however, it seems difficult for Companions Consular to advance to those higher positions or generally become more involved with the organisation. Writing about that early nineteenth century organisation within the Guild, Judith Stoddart sees Ruskin as having "re-imagined a labour theory of value in which worth is measured by the amount of work expended towards a common goal" (138). However, the "amount of work", and consequently "worth", have been problematic: who was to measure them and how? Despite declarations that everyone doing useful work was a workman and the work could be physical as well as intellectual (see Chapter 1), Ruskin on occasion discriminated against Companions or Retainers of lower social and economic status. One victim of this "problematical commitment to hierarchy" was William Graham who toiled with dedication and long-unappreciated sacrifice in Bewdley, as uncovered by Mark Frost in *Lost Companions* and discussed by me in Chapter 2 (13). In the twenty-first century, class and social divisions at Ruskin Land are not straightforward and there is no discrimination towards those doing physical work. Yet, like the Guild, the

WCLT seems to unconsciously partly replicate Ruskin's nineteenth century organisational model. In most of their work, the WCLT depend on the physical labour of their estate staff and the small army of volunteers. These are recognised as invaluable also in terms of fulfilling the WCLT's "community" goal. However, there does not seem to be much opportunity for upward mobility within the Trust—or the Guild—in Bewdley.

Reflexivity and Limitations of the Study

Like any study, mine also had its limitations, both methodological and personal, and these need to be acknowledged. Methodological limitations are primarily to do with my sample size. It is possible that interesting results might have been obtained had I been able to interview a few more conservation volunteers. I do not think this would have changed the results, but simply added to the study. However, getting a larger sample was not possible because of problems with access: I had to rely on sympathetic mediators to put me in touch with potential participants. There were also problems with access to site caused simply by geographical distance between me and Ruskin Land. Another sample size related limitation is the exclusion of landowners from the study. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, WCLT manages land for a group of landowners who are neither members nor volunteers of the Trust, nor Guild Companions.[59] Including their views on their connection to Ruskin Land and of the projects there could have added another dimension to the study, as could have their attitudes to nature and sustainability. However, it was my conscious decision to exclude that group, as the study did not have the capacity to include them. My goal in designing the study was to investigate how Ruskin's ideas have been applied and re-enacted at Ruskin Land, therefore I decided to limit the study to the area and people directly involved. Should my study inspire another, it may be worthwhile to consider including landowners in the research. As the designer of the study, I had to make independent choices and anticipate possible outcomes without the guidance of prior research on the topic. In the Introduction to this thesis I indicated that there was a noticeable gap in research on the

[59] Perhaps with one exception, but that participant is very deeply involved with both the Guild and the WCLT and so those roles take precedence over the landowner role.

application of Ruskin's communitarian and environmental thought in the twenty-first century, especially in relation to Ruskin Land; I hope the study I conducted and presented in this chapter will begin the process of filling this gap. Not following in other researchers' footprints can be both quite liberating and anxiety-inducing as there does not exist an example to fall back on or compare one's research to.

Reflexivity is a tool of quality control in qualitative studies and it is now considered standard practice to include a piece on the researcher themselves. As Linda Finlay writes in her article "Negotiating the Swamp: the Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice" (2002), the researcher, with all their attitudes and preconceptions, is the "central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data" (210). To Finlay, the process has the potential to turn into a "swamp," an impossible-to-navigate web of questions on how personal to make it and what to, and not to, disclose (212). In an attempt not to fall into the reflexivity trap, I chose to discuss here only the issues that, in my opinion, may have genuinely influenced the process of research for this study such as my relative inexperience as an ethnographer and my changing positionality over the course of the PhD research. As an additional reflexivity exercise available in Appendix 5, I answer my own interview questions.

As a novice researcher in the field, I attempted to play the role of what Scott et al. compare in their article "The Reluctant Researcher: Shyness in the Field" (2015) to a confident "director of the drama" controlling the entire operation (715). According to Scott et al., this "shyness in the field" befalls even the most experienced researchers, especially while talking to complete strangers. Such my participants were not, and being acquainted and on good terms with many of them helped alleviate feelings of uncertainty, as did the awareness that in approaching WCLT volunteers, I would not be approaching completely random strangers. Over two and a half years of visits to Ruskin Land, I had seen and interacted with many of my future volunteer participants, all of whom have always been friendly and welcoming. Visiting Bewdley, with periodic stays at Ruskin Land and resulting increasing knowledge about the place, as well as eventual membership in the Guild of St. George (I became a Companion in 2018), have affected this data collection in the field. All stages of data collection, from designing the study to carrying it out,

may have been different, yet not necessarily better, had I interviewed people at the beginning of my PhD rather than towards the end. I am confident that the decision to carry out the interviews in the final year of my PhD was the right one. Placing the study at the end allowed me to ask informed questions (including follow-up questions) of my participants and helped with participant recruitment, especially from among Companions of the Guild. By the time I began collecting interviews, I had already become a member of the Guild myself and had met more people involved at Ruskin Land than I had thought there were. Simplified access and perhaps a more favourable reception than if I had not been a Companion explains the slightly oversized sample of participants from that group. It could be said that, in the course of my own involvement at Ruskin Land, I went through a sort of an outsider-insider transition: I started out as an outsider introduced into Ruskin Land by gatekeepers with access to the entire organisation; as I became increasingly more familiar with people from this community, I became more of an insider, perceptive of nuances in relationships at Ruskin Land. This was enhanced by my membership in the Guild. However, not being directly and regularly involved with the WCLT and its volunteers, I feel I remained enough of an outsider to be able to objectively conduct the study.

People's familiarity with me, or general friendliness and being at ease during the interviews, as well as my being a beginner researcher, occasionally meant that I lost my directorial powers and struggled to rein in talkative participants or was uncertain to what extent I could let the interviews turn into chats where participants asked questions of me. I did allow it, but with mixed feelings: I thought engaging in this way might bring out interesting answers, but I was also conscious of the need to avoid influencing people's responses by giving too much information away. However, on several occasions, this proved to be necessary, and I intervened with one of the interview questions: Question 6—Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth" (*Works*, 1906: 27.90). What is your opinion on that?—proved to divert people's attention from environmental to emotional needs they felt were missing from that short list. While their quickness to point out that human relationships were also essential to life was interesting, I felt obligated to explain that the quotation I presented them with was

only partial and provide the remaining part about admiration, hope, and love to pull attention back to "pure Air, Water, and Earth." Only those of my respondents who were more environment–oriented did not need assistance with this question. As data collection progressed, it occurred to me that perhaps I should have been asking participants about "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful" instead of "pure Air, Water, and Earth." The three adjectives are perhaps more relatable to sustainability that I wanted to find out about at Ruskin Land, they are also used as the motto of Ruskin Land. However, I only found out that the adjectives were being used as a motto, and what this implied, during my interviews: Participants 4 and 23 used it and Participant 28 explained it. Since this was when data collection was already in progress and all my ethics forms had been approved with the original "pure Air, Water, and Earth" question, I decided not to change anything. Looking back at some of the interesting answers I received, I think this was a good decision. However, should my study be replicated in the future, it might be interesting to change that question or add another on "beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful."

Conclusion

Ruskin's twenty-first century Utopia at Ruskin Land is being re-enacted by the Guild of St. George and the Wyre Community Land Trust. Both rely in their work there on a small army of dedicated locals, and I wanted to offer them a chance to speak about their experience of that. Results of the data collection were complex and rewarding and have duly been reported in detail in this chapter. They show that this group of people who, I argue, are a modern version of a Ruskinian community, share certain views and differ in others. However, the overwhelming majority are loyal to the core Ruskinian values of community, appreciation of nature and sustainability—although they may not be fully conscious of that. My main hope was to understand why Ruskin Land was a place people come together to work at if their goal was no longer a Ruskinian Utopia. The main answer emerging from the study seems to be, at least at this point in time, to look after nature in a way that sustains it while also sustaining the community.

Some of the answers I obtained suggest that there might be matters the Guild and the Wyre Community Land Trust may want to give some thought to, if

they are not already considering them. The Guild has been trying to restate its objectives in the twenty-first century and redefine its function. Its membership is going through a period of rapid expansion. It may be worth deciding what is expected of Companions, at Ruskin Land and elsewhere. Are they to know about Ruskin? Or is this of secondary importance as long as they implement some values in their life and work that could be called Ruskinian? Does the Guild want Companions to be divided into the Servant, Militant and Consular groups Ruskin anticipated and that seem to be in place now? What are the ways in which Companions can move upwards and be more involved in the Guild? At Ruskin Land, this seems to happen through personal connections. In the 1970s, the Guild was conscious of the danger of becoming "but a bunch of self-perpetuating Directors" (Newsletter Nov. 1979, SA GSG 2)—how to avoid being that in the 2020s albeit with an extremely large group of Companions Consular?

In the Wyre, is it worth better defining the relationship with the WCLT, so that it is clear to all involved at Ruskin Land? This may be important in terms of the message that the Guild/WCLT want to communicate there, the uniformity of it and ease of dissemination among those involved. Should there be a space (an indoor or outdoor display for example) where visitors and volunteers can go in to find out more about Ruskin Land and Ruskin? How to make Ruskin Land more inclusive and diverse? The vast majority of people involved there, with the exception of WCLT staff, are retired or with other lifestyles permitting involvement during the working week. They are also all of a certain economic status allowing at least for ownership of a car (necessary to get to Ruskin Land). Is inclusivity a concern at all? What kind of a community are the Guild and the WCLT ultimately hoping to build there?

Conclusion

> Then appear the disciples or curious readers who have not been shaken in their innermost being with anything like the intensity of the original Utopian visionary, and they adapt, prune, distort, refine, render banal, make matter-of-fact the utopia [sic], so that it reenters the world as a force for good or evil. Compromises with existence are effected; the ironclad formula is relaxed. (Manuel and Manuel 27)

The seed for this work was planted at the, now forever closed, Cheshire Campus of Manchester Metropolitan University. It was there that I had hoped to bring together the University community with that of Crewe and unite them over small environmental projects for which the Cheshire Campus was perfectly suited. With fellow students, we had planned to do some communal gardening and promote self-sufficiency and low waste living. As the Third Fors would have it, soon Ruskin invited himself into my life, and so what began as a student sustainability society, turned into a PhD project uniting my interest in sustainability, passion for English literature and culture, and academic background in political science. Always fascinated by Utopias, I was intrigued to find out that a settlement inspired by Ruskin's Utopian thought had existed in the Wyre Forest for over a century. Originally, I planned that findings from the Wyre would inform an applied project in Crewe: a community allotment on campus. However, announcement of the impending closure of the Cheshire campus necessitated a shift of focus exclusively to the Wyre. I wanted to know what it was in Ruskin that so resonated with people and how had this little Utopia managed to survive for so long—and whether, in the twenty-first century, it was Ruskin's Utopia at all. The research questions I set myself were, therefore, what were Ruskin's plans for his communities, and how had these plans been interpreted and applied throughout the years. My focus was Bewdley in the Wyre.

A literature review quickly revealed that, while there existed multiple analyses of various aspects of Ruskin's thought, most concentrated on what

happened during Ruskin's lifetime and up to three or four decades after his death. Even recent scholarship from this century, for example, *Ruskin in Perspective* (2007), *After Ruskin* (2011), *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin* (2015), tends to concentrate on that period. Only now, in the year of the bicentenary of Ruskin's birth, work that considers Ruskin's impact now is beginning to be published, notably Andrew Hill's *Ruskinland* (2019). And yet, in Bewdley, I was faced with a living, breathing heritage that was not being studied beyond its early history. Mark Frost's *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George: A Revisionary History* (2014) was an invaluable source of information about that first phase in Ruskin's Wyre settlement's life, and Wardle and Quayle's book *Ruskin in Bewdley* (2007) expertly outlined its second phase. However, I had questions that neither book could answer, and a conviction that the stories of the land and of those who lived on it after the Liverpool families also deserved to be heard. I wanted to allow key actors to speak in their own voice and move the story forward through time, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

In Chapter 1, the voice was Ruskin's and the focus on his *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*. Taking into account *Fors*'s epistolary format, I offered an analysis of the work as both a series of letters and a book of letters, and speculated on how *Fors* as an amalgamation of these genres may be read by Ruskin's followers. Then, in a synthesis from *Fors*, I outlined Ruskin's plans for England, comparing and contrasting them with other agrarian Utopian schemes that would have been available for those seeking after a new way of life around Ruskin's time. I then let Ruskin report on his first attempts to set his plans in motion through establishing the Guild of St. George and obtaining first plots of land for his scheme. I briefly described these other attempts (Totley, Cloughton) before concentrating solely on Bewdley. Dominating Chapter 1, Ruskin's voice grows weaker throughout the rest of the thesis as his followers on site in Bewdley take over.

Chapter 2 spanned 130 years of the settlement and covered the years 1872-2004. My intention was to portray Ruskinian settlers to the Wyre and their, and the Guild's, attempts to adhere to Ruskin's principles of self-sufficiency. I did this in episodes, each devoted to distinctive groups of Ruskin Land tenants and periods in

the life of the land: from developments during Ruskin's lifetime, to life in the first decades after his death, through the difficult World War II and post-War years and the relative calm of the 1960s-2000s. Extensive archival research in Sheffield Archives, the British Library, Worcester City Archives, the Guild solicitor's office in Malvern and the National Archives allowed me to answer some questions arising from Frost's and Wardle and Quayle's books: how big was the plot of land in Bewdley; what were the circumstances of its procurement; who were the early Guild tenants at St. George's Farm; who were the Guild tenants who came after the Liverpool families; what was the fate of the land, and tenants, in wartime; what was the Guild's role there throughout and how environmentally-informed was the management? Particularly fascinating were my discoveries on the size and cost of the plot that may change the way we think about the beginnings of Bewdley. Interesting, and part of a larger narrative of the war effort of the British countryside, were the discoveries I made about WWII at Ruskin Land. Intriguing, and worthy of further research after this thesis, are the early years of St. George's Farm cottage and its first tenants, whose names I discovered on electoral registers. There might be a Guild connection there—as in the case of Harold Bell, Edith Hope Scott's distant relation—that could merit further study.

In Chapter 3, my contribution to scholarship is in bringing the story of Ruskin Land up to date. The chapter concentrated on the most recent, and most environmentally informed, developments in the Wyre as enacted by the Wyre Community Land Trust in co-operation with the Guild of St. George. Chapter 3 outlined the story of John and Linda Iles and their tenancy at Uncllys Farm, their sympathetic care for the land and subsequent establishment of the Wyre Community Land Trust and the unforeseen link of the organisation to Ruskin's idea of trust. Then, the chapter looked at how the WCLT and its work in the Wyre as a whole galvanized the Guild into thinking about its role generally in the twenty-first century and specifically in Bewdley. I also considered Ruskin Land's new Ruskinian motto "Beautiful, Peaceful, Fruitful" and discussed it as an unacknowledged, but effectively enacted, connection to the three-legged stool of sustainability. Chapter 3 proposed that at Ruskin Land in the twenty-first century, Ruskin's thought takes second place to sustainability.

The story of Ruskin Land would have been incomplete if those involved in its current day-to-day work had not been allowed to speak. To obtain their stories, I designed a qualitative study of attitudes to Ruskin, Ruskin Land and nature, and presented the results in Chapter 4. This original, interdisciplinary approach allowed me to confront Ruskin's theories with the lived experience at Ruskin Land. The results of my mini ethnographic case study revealed what Chapter 3 already suggested: that in the twenty-first century at Ruskin Land concern for the environment takes precedence over John Ruskin's ideas for the land. It also showed that Ruskin's nineteenth century hierarchies had been recreated, consciously or not, both in the Guild and in the organisation of life at Ruskin Land. The study and its results might be of use to the Guild of St. George when considering its organisation and policy in the new decade.

As with many a research project, I too found it necessary to limit the scope of mine and not pursue certain trails. Therefore, there are several potential directions of further research. One could be Ruskin's influence on ethical socialism manifest in the revival of localism and communitarianism that transcend the political left. Ruskin's contribution of a new ideal community with a collective moral purpose links emergent nineteenth century social democracy to ideas that are currently resonant in contemporary policy in empowered communities, devolved public services, etc. The data I collected for my ethnographic case study showed that, in some cases, politics played a part in participants' interest in Ruskin Land and so this line of enquiry may be worth pursuing. The richness of my qualitative data could also be a source of information on participants' attitudes to more than just Ruskin, nature and Ruskin Land; it could perhaps be a basis for another, broader, qualitative study of Ruskin Land, Bewdley or the Guild.

Another avenue of further research, and one that is especially close to my heart, could be extended from Chapter 2. It involves the Liverpool Ruskinians and, particularly, Edith Hope Scott. An understudied and perhaps wrongly underappreciated author, Scott's writings reveal an endearingly self-deprecating, loyal (to her friends, family and her cause) and surprisingly witty woman whose works are connected by more than just containing "references to the Guild and [reflecting] the Guild ideals" (Wardle and Quayle 40). There was no remit in this

thesis for a detailed examination of all of Scott's work, but should such be done, she may be lifted out of obscurity and placed among turn-of-the-century women travel writers, religious writers, and children's authors.

This research has been a journey. Like many who visit Ruskin Land, I feel lucky to have had the chance to experience it as well as study. I leave Ruskin Land on a high, with ambitious plans for the future. The Guild of St. George too is on the brink of change: the new Master, taking over in November 2019, is the organisation's first female and non-British, leader. What the effect of such change will be on the Guild, and on Ruskin Land, remains to be seen. One is certain, exciting times lie ahead.

Works Cited

Albritton, Vicky and Fredrik Albritton Jonsson. *Green Victorians: The Simple Life in John Ruskin's Lake District*. U Chicago P, 2016.

Altman, Janet G. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form.* Ohio State UP, 1982.

Anthony, P.D. *John Ruskin's Labour: A study of Ruskin's social theory*. Cambridge UP, 1983.

Armytage, Walter H.G. *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.

Ashley. "Beaulieu (Bewdley)–The Beautiful Place." *Medieval Midlands*, 23 Nov. 2015, medievalmidlandsblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/23/beaulieu-bewdley-the-beautiful-place/. Accessed 28 Oct. 2018.

Ballantyne, Andrew. *John Ruskin*. Reaktion Books, 2015.

Barrie, David. "The Future of the Guild." *The Companion,* no. 1, 2001, pp. 7.

---. Telephone interview. 15 Aug. 2019.

Barton, David and Nigel Hall, editors. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. John Benjamins Publishing, 1999.

Batchelor, John. *John Ruskin: No Wealth but Life. A Biography.* Pimlico, 2001.

Bate, Jonathan. *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. Routledge, 1991. Bate, Jonathan.

BBC. *"Bombs over Kidderminster." WW2 People's War*. www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/54/a3429254.shtml. Accessed 30 Oct. 2018.

Berg, Bruce L. "Qualitative Research in Social Sciences." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods,* edited by Lisa M. Given, SAGE Publications, 2012, pp. 1-9 (827-831). dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.

Biodiversity Survey. "Part 2: Detailed Minutes." Compiled by J. Iles et al., Biodiversity Advisory Panel to the Guild of St. George, 25 July 2017. TS.

British Library. Electoral Registers for Western or Bewdley Division 1937-38. SPR.Mic.P.658/BL.W.110.

---. "Map of Worcestershire." *British Library Online Gallery*. www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/unvbrit/m/zoomify83496.html. Accessed 18 Oct. 2018.

---. "Vigorniensis Comitatus Sheet 21." *British Library Online Gallery.* www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/unvbrit/v/zoomify83376.html. Accessed 18 Oct. 2018.

Cerutti, Toni. "'Blind Mouths': Ruskin and the Reading of the Text." *Ruskin in Perspective. Contemporary Essays*, edited by Carmen Casaliggi and P. March-Russel, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 16-31.

Charity Commission. "The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty." *Registered Charities in England and Wales*. beta.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=205846. Accessed 19 June 2019.

Clark, Kenneth. *Ruskin Today.* Penguin Books, 1954.

"Community." *Oxford Lexico*. en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/community. Accessed 12 Apr. 2019.

Cope, Michael. R. et al. "Making Sense of Community Action and Voluntary Participation—A Multilevel Test of Multilevel Hypotheses: Do Communities Act?" *Rural Sociology*, vol. 81, no. 1, pp. 3-34. Doi: 10.1111/ruso.12085.

Crane, Nicholas. *The Making of the British Landscape. From the Ice Age to the Present.* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2016.

Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. SAGE, 2013.

Creswell, John W. and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Edge, 2018.

Davis, Alan. "Technology." *The Cambridge Companion to Ruskin*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 170-186.

Dawson, Paul and Stephen Wildman. *George Allen of Sunnyside*. The Ruskin Library, 2007.

Dearden, James D. *John Ruskin's Guild of St. George*. The Guild of St. George, 2010.

---. Personal letter. 13 Apr. 2019.

---. “Secretaries of the Guild of St. George.” *The Companion*, no. 16, 2016, pp. 70-74., www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/media/1422/thecompanion16.pdf. Accessed 2 Sept. 2019.

Dickinson, Rachel, editor. *John Ruskin’s Correspondence with Joan Severn: Sense and Nonsense Letters*. Legenda, 2009.

Dickinson, Rachel M.W. “Needlework and John Ruskin’s ‘Acicular art of Nations.”’ *E-rea: Revue Électronique d’Études sur le Monde Anglophone.* vol. 16, no. 1, 2018, n. pag. journals.openedition.org/erea/6710#tocto1n3.

---. “Ruskinian Moral Authority and Theatre’s Ideal Woman.” *Ruskin, the Theatre and Victorian Visual Culture*, edited by Anselm Heinrich et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 58-73.

Eagles, Stuart. *After Ruskin: The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920.* Oxford UP, 2011.

---. “Past Masters: A Builder of Birmingham, George Baker (1825-1910).” *Guild of St. George,* 2016, pp. 53-58, www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/media/1520/eagles_georgebakerpdf.pdf. Accessed 4 Sept. 2019.

---. “Political Legacies.” *The Cambridge Companion to Ruskin*, edited by Francis O’Gorman, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 249-62.

---. “Re: St. George’s Farm Original Size?” Received by Dominika Wielgopolan, 29 Oct. 2018.

---. “The ’insinuating touch of influence’: Aspects of Ruskin’s Political Legacy.” *Ruskin in Perspective. Contemporary Essays*, edited by Carmen Casaliggi and P. March-Russel, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 83-100.

European Commission. “Over 40% of Europe Covered in Forests.” *Eurostat*. ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20180321-1. Accessed 15 July 2019.

Evans, Paul. “Country Diary: Butterflies Instinctively Make Chemistry Sexy.” *The Guardian* online, 6 June 2008. www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/06/country-diary-butterflies-chemistry-sexy-wyre-forest-worcestershire. Accessed 10 July 2019.

---. *Oak Earth*: *a View from a One-Legged Stool.* Guild of St. George, 2018. TS.

Finlay, Linda. "Negotiating the Swamp: the Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice." *Qualitative Research*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2002. pp. 209-230. doi.org/10.1177/146879410200200205.

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. "Sustainable Forest Management." www.fao.org/forestry/sfm/en/. Accessed 2 June 2019.

Forest Research. "Woodland Statistics." www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/woodland-statistics/. Accessed 15 July 2019.

Frost, Mark. *The Law of Help: John Ruskin's Ecological Vision, 1843-86*. 2005. Southampton U, PhD dissertation. eprints.soton.ac.uk/345073/

---. *The Lost Companions and John Ruskin's Guild of St George: A Revisionary History*. Anthem Press, 2014.

---. "Ruskin Studio Opening." *The Companion*, vol. 10, 2010, pp. 11-12.

Fusch, Patricia. I. et al. "How to Conduct a Mini-Ethnographic Case Study: A Guide for Novice Researchers." *The Qualitative Report*, vol. *22*, no. 3, 2017, pp. 923-941. nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss3/16.

Goldsmith, Sally. *Thirteen Acres: John Ruskin and the Totley Communists*. The Guild of St. George, 2017.

Government of the United Kingdom. "Landmark Agriculture Bill to Deliver a Green Brexit." *Gov.uk*, 12 Sept. 2018. www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-agriculture-bill-to-deliver-a-green-brexit. Accessed 20 July 2019.

---. "25 Year Environment Plan." *Gov.uk,* 11 Jan. 2018. www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan. Accessed 20 July 2019.

Greeves, John. "Ruskin Land: A Modern Vision for Today." *The Woodworker and Good Woodworking*, vol. 123, no. 5, 2019, pp. 62-67.

Guild of St. George. Communications, documents, minutes, reports. Meersbrook Hall, Sheffield.

---. "Projects." www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/projects. Accessed 14 July 2019.

---. "Ruskin in Wyre." www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/projects. Accessed 20 Oct. 2018.

Halcomb, Elizabeth J. and Patricia M. Davidson. “Is Verbatim Transcription of Interview Data Always Necessary?” *Applied Nursing Research*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, pp. 38-42. doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2005.06.001.

Hardy, Dennis. *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England*. Longman, 1979.

---. *Utopian England. Community Experiments 1900-1945.* Routlege, 2000.

Harris, Anthony. *Why Do Our Girls Have Large Shoes?* The Guild of St. George, 1985.

Harvard Health Publishing. “Sour Mood Getting You Down? Get Back to Nature.” *Harvard Men’s Health Watch*. July 2018 www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/sour-mood-getting-you-down-get-back-to-nature. Accessed 15 June 2019.

Henderson, Caspar. “Wilding by Isabella Tree Review—How a Farm Returned to Nature.” *The Guardian* online, 28 June 2018. www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jun/28/wilding-isabella-tree-review-farm-return-nature. Accessed 11 Sept. 2019.

Hewison, Robert. “Afterword: Ruskin and the Institutions.” *New Approaches to Ruskin: Thirteen Essays*, edited by Hewison, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981 pp. 214-228.

Hill, Andrew. *Ruskinland: How John Ruskin Shapes Our World.* Pallas Athene, 2019.

Hodge, Ian. “In Search of a Landscape Value.” *Proceedings of the Valuing Landscape Conference, U of Greenwich, 6-7 Sept. 2018,* pp. 86-94. landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2018/10/D01P05-ian-hodge.pdf. Accessed 11 July 2019.

Iles, John. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018.

---. “Re: WCLT—Why This Format?” Received by Dominika Wielgopolan, 4 June 2019.

Iles, John and Linda Iles. “Ruskin, Bewdley and Sustainability: Tales from Uncllys.” TS. In the collection of John Iles, Bewdley.

Invisible Studio. “Studio in the Woods.” www.invisiblestudio.org/selected_work/studio-in-the-woods/. Accessed 10 June 2019.

Jackson, Kevin. *The Worlds of John Ruskin*. Pallas Athene and The Ruskin Foundation, 2010.

King James Version. Bible Gateway, www.biblegateway.com. Accessed 18 Sept. 2019.

Kristensen, Guro. K. and Malin N. Ravn. "The Voices Heard and the Voices Silenced: Recruitment Processes in Qualitative Interview Studies." *Qualitative Research*, vol. 15, no. 6, 2015, pp. 722–737. doi.org/10.1177/1468794114567496.

Kvale, Steinar. *Doing Interviews.* SAGE Publications, 2007.

Law, Jonathan, and Elizabeth A. Martin. *A Dictionary of Law*. Oxford UP, 2009, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199551248.001.0001/acref-9780199551248. Accessed 10 Sep. 2019.

MacDonald, Graham A. "The Politics of the Golden River: Ruskin on Environment and the Stationary State." *Environment and History*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2012, pp. 125–150., www.jstor.org/stable/23250895.

MacDuffie, Allen. *Victorian Literature, Energy and the Ecological Imagination*. Cambridge UP, 2014.

Maidment, Brian. "Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera* and Ruskinism, 1870-1900." *New Approaches to Ruskin: Thirteen Essays*, edited by Robert Hewison. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 196-212.

Manuel, Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World.* Basil Blackwell, 1979.

Marsh, Jan. *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914*. Quartet Books, 1982.

Moser, Jason F. et al. "Third-Person Self-Talk Facilitates Emotion Regulation without Engaging Cognitive Control: Converging Evidence from ERP and fMRI." Abstract. *Nature Scientific Reports*, vol. 7, 2007, www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-04047-3. Accessed 12 Sept. 2019.

National Community Land Trust Network. "About CLTs." *Community Land Trusts.* www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/what-is-a-clt/about-clts. Accessed 18 June 2019.

National Trust. “What is Woodland Coppicing?” www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/what-is-woodland-coppicing. Accessed 19 Oct. 2018.

Natural England. *Future of Farming Award 2008.* Natural England Publications, 2008.

---. “Worcestershire’s National Nature Reserve: Corporate Report.” 31 Oct. 2008. www.gov.uk/government/publications/worcestershires-national-nature-reserves/worcestershires-national-nature-reserves. Accessed 19 Oct. 2018.

---. “Wyre Forest SSSI.” *Designated Sites View.* designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1004198&SiteName=&countyCode=49&responsiblePerson=. Accessed 19 Oct. 2018.

Nature Conservancy Council, England Unit. *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey—a Technique for Environmental Audit. Field Manual.* 1990. jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/pub90_HandbookforPhase1HabitatSurvey.pdf. Accessed on 10 June 2019.

The Nature of Wyre—A Forest Relived: Wyre Forest History on CD. Narrated by Pauline Lowe. Audio Visitor. CD.

Nelson, Robert L. “The Price of Bread: Poverty, Purchasing Power, and The Victorian Laborer’s Standard of Living.” *The Victorian Web*. www.victorianweb.org/history/work/nelson1.html. Accessed 28 Aug. 2018.

O’Gorman, Francis, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin*. Cambridge UP, 2015.

O’Gorman, Francis. *Late Ruskin: New Contexts*. Routlege, 2001.

Participants 1-36. Personal interview. 6 Nov. 2018 – 14 May 2019.

Patterson, Richard. “The Cost of Living in 1888.” *The Victorian Web*. www.victorianweb.org/economics/wages4.html. Accessed 28 Aug. 2018.

Porrit, Jonathon. “Capitalism As If the World Matters.” *Jonathon Porrit Blog*, 22 Oct. 2007. www.jonathonporritt.com/blog/capitalism-if-world-matters. Accessed 10 July 2019.

Purvis, Ben et al. “Three Pillars of Sustainability: In Search of Conceptual Origins.” Abstract. *Sustainability Science*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2018, pp. 681-695. doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0627-5.

Quayle, Cedric C. Personal interview. 7 Nov. 2018 and 10 Dec. 2018.

---. “Sowing & Reaping Ruskin’s Vison on the Land: The Work of David and Gillian Meehan at Uncllys Farm, Ruskin Land.” *The Companion,* vol.1, 2001, pp. 25-26.

Ruskin, John. *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain.* Edited by Dinah Birch. Edinburgh UP, 2000.

---. *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (“Library Edition” vol. 27-29). Edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. George Allen, 1903-12. www.lancaster.ac.uk/ruskin-library/the-complete-works-of-john-ruskin/.

---. *The Museum and Guild of St. George* (“Library Edition” vol. 27-29). Edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. George Allen, 1903-12. www.lancaster.ac.uk/ruskin-library/the-complete-works-of-john-ruskin/.

---. “Notes on the General Principles of Employment For the Destitute and Criminal Classes.” Unto This Last, Munera Pulveris, Time and Tide with Other Writings on Political Economy 1860-1873 (“Library Edition” vol. 17). Edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. George Allen, 1903-12. pp. 541-546. www.lancaster.ac.uk/ruskin-library/the-complete-works-of-john-ruskin/.

Ruskin's Dream: John Ruskin's Dream of a Museum in the Wyre Forest Near Bewdley is Finally Realised (The Building of the Ruskin Studio). Narrated by Brian Draper. Hazelwood Video Productions, 2010. DVD.

Scott, Edith H. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Author*. 1935. TS. Collection of Graham A. MacDonald.

---. *The Beloved*. Arthur Stockwell, 1921.

---. “The Garden.” *The Holy Mountain, and Other Verse*. The Liverpool Booksellers, 1911, pp. 22-24.

---. (1931) *Ruskin’s Guild of St. George*. Methuen and Co., 1931.

Scott, Susie et al. “The Reluctant Researcher: Shyness in the Field.” *Qualitative Research*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2012, pp. 715–734. doi.org/10.1177/1468794112439015.

Sinden, Neil. “Return to Ruskin Land.” *Arboreal: A Collection of New Woodland Writing,* edited by Adrian Cooper, Little Toller Books, 2017, pp. 167-181.

Sheffield Archives. *Guild of St. George Collection.* GSG2; GSG3; GSG/AF/138; GSG24/2; GSG/CB/66; GSG/AF/5; GSG/AF/37; GSG/AF/62; GSG/AF/103.

Shrimpton, Nicholas. "Politics and Economics." *The Cambridge Companion to Ruskin*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 116-129.

Soil Association. "Our History." https://www.soilassociation.org/about-us/our-history/. Accessed 24 March 2020.

Stoddart, Judith. "Nation and class." *The Cambridge Companion to Ruskin*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 130-143.

"Sustainability." *Oxford Lexico.* www.lexico.com/en/definition/sustainability. Accessed 25 June 2019.

United Nations. *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf. Accessed 14 July 2019.

"Utopia." *Oxford Lexico*. www.lexico.com/en/definition/Utopia. Accessed 28 Aug. 2019.

Waithe, Marcus. "Nature's Uses: John Ruskin, Trusteeship and Environmental Economy." 2019. TS.

Wall text for *Beautiful, Peaceful, Fruitful: Ruskin in Wyre*. 2 Mar.-28 April 2019, Bewdley Museum, Bewdley.

Wardle, Peter and Cedric Quayle. *Ruskin and Bewdley*. The Guild of St. George, 2007.

Watson, Frederick. *Literary Associations of Liverpool*. Philip, Son and Nephew, 1928.

Westwood, Brett et al. *The Nature of Wyre.* Pisces Publications, 2015.

Wilmer, Clive. "The Guild Today and Tomorrow." *The Companion*, vol. 13, 2013, pp. 11-12.

---. "Meeting of the Board of Directors and AGM." *The Companion*, vol. 8, 2008, pp. 1-3.

---. "The New Master's Acceptance Speech." *The Companion*, vol. 10, 2010, pp. 2-4.

---. Personal interview. 25 Jan. 2019.

Wheeler, Michael. Introduction. *Ruskin and Environment: The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Wheeler, Manchester UP, 1995, pp. 1-9.

Woodland Trust. “Ancient Woodland.” www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/trees-woods-and-wildlife/woodland-habitats/ancient-woodland/. Accessed 19 Oct. 2018.

Worcester Archives. Electoral Registers for Bewdley North and Western Division, 1907-1918. Rolls 50-60.

Wyre Community Land Trust. Communications, documents, minutes. St. George’s Farm, Bewdley.

---. “Our Story.” wyreclt.org.uk/. Accessed 14 July 2019.

Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership. *A Vision for Wyre.* 12 June 2014. www.wflp.org.uk/assets/uploads/downloads/ee8b0-A_Vision_for-Wyre.pdf. Accessed on 10 July 2019.

“Beautiful, Peaceful, and Fruitful”? (Re)Creating Ruskin’s Utopia in the Wyre Forest

Appendices

Dominika Marta Wielgopolan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the
Manchester Metropolitan University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
Manchester Metropolitan University

2019

Appendices

1. Participant Roles at Ruskin Land

Table 2

Participant Roles at Ruskin Land. Red background marks dominant role, current or lapsed.

Participant No.	Role				
	Guild Companion	Guild Director	WCLT Staff	WCLT Director	WCLT Volunteer
P1	✓				✓
P2					✓
P3	✓				✓
P4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P5					✓
P6					✓
P7					✓
P8					✓
P9	✓		✓		
P10	✓				
P11	✓				
P12	✓				
P13					✓
P14					✓
P15					✓
P16					✓
P17					✓
P18	✓				
P19	✓			✓	✓
P20	✓	✓		✓	
P21			✓		✓
P22			✓		
P23	✓	✓		✓	✓
P24					✓
P25				✓	
P26	✓				✓
P27	✓				✓
P28	✓	✓			
P29					✓
P30					✓
P31					✓
P32					✓
P33			✓		✓
P34	✓	✓	✓		
P35	✓	✓	✓		

2. Participant Information Sheets

Participant Information Sheet – For Companions of the Guild of St George (23/06/2018, Version 1)

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire

Name of Study: Ruskinian Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Past, Present and Future

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Introduction

I'm Dominika Wielgopolan, a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met), Cheshire. I'm working on my doctoral thesis *Ruskinian Sustainability: Past, Present and Future* which is about Ruskin's ideas about communities and the environment as expressed in his *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Labourers and Workmen of Great Britain* (published 1870-1884). My PhD thesis is interested in how those nineteenth century ideas have been interpreted and applied by Ruskin's followers since they were first expressed in *Fors Clavigera*. I chose Ruskin Land, Bewdley as my case study because it is the only Ruskinian community with a history of almost continuous activity since the land was gifted to Ruskin in the 19th century. Part of this requires me to talk to people involved with Ruskin Land.

What is the purpose of the study?

Through this study I hope to find out which of Ruskin's instructions and plans outlined in *Fors Clavigera* have been replicated by settlers on Ruskin Land - since the 19th century to the present – and through this, to evaluate the relevance of his ideas to people in the present and future. My overall thesis concentrates on Ruskin's environmental thought and ideas on living sustainable lives. Ruskin envisaged that small communities would work and live together making 'some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.96) and through talking to you and others involved with Ruskin Land, I hope to see if this has been achieved at Ruskin Land and how. Ruskin imagined that settlers on his land would be families only, but this has not been so at Ruskin Land since the 1930s and yet the area survived and is more active now, than possibly ever before. Thus, I also aim to

understand what makes a community and why people come together to look after nature if it is not to support themselves from it.

Why have you been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a Companion of the Guild of St George. There may be up to 10 more participants like you in this study.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. I will send you the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form in advance by email, so that you can familiarise yourself with them and decide if you're happy to take part in my study. At that time you will be made aware of my proposed visit dates to Ruskin Land where our discussion can take place. When we meet, I will ask you to sign the Consent Form to show you agree to take part and then the discussion can take place. We can also have the discussion over the phone or skype. In that case, I will send you the consent form by post and ask you to return it signed. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen if you take part?

If you choose to take part in this study, I will ask you about your connection to Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of these set questions (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

12. How long have you been (or were) involved with Ruskin Land for?
13. What were your reasons for getting involved?
14. How would you describe your role here?
15. Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land? In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?
16. How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?
17. Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: 'pure Air, Water, and Earth' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.90). What is your opinion on that?
18. Does the word 'sustainability' mean anything to you? If so, what?
19. What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?
20. Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?
21. What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?
22. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

I will write down our discussion as it takes place either in a notebook or typed on a laptop.
I may also, with your permission, audio record our discussion.

I will not take any photographs of, or film any of the participants. I may photograph, with permission, locations in and around Ruskin Land.

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

If you would prefer, your answers will be anonymised. In that case, no identifying information will be included in my thesis, other than that which you have consented to provide.
If, then, at any point in our discussion you disclose information which might identify you, I will ask you if you wish this identifying information to be struck from my records.

I may also use this data, either in full or in part, in publications inspired by this project, for example in academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

All hard paper/audio recorded data will be stored in a locked cabinet, either within a locked university office or at my home, accessed only by me. Electronic data will be stored on any of the following: my Man Met networked computer, my Man Met external hard drive, my own memory stick. All of these will be password protected with a password known only by me.

I will retain all data for a maximum of 10 years after graduating from Man Met with my PhD.
After this time, I will dispose of all data (in paper or electronic format) in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will you have to do?

You will be asked to read a Participant Information Sheet.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of the set questions in the section above (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I have identified no disadvantages or risks to your participation.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study before or after meeting me, you should speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions (0162 247 5176 or dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk).

If you wish to complain or comment on my conduct, you can contact Dr Rachel Dickinson (my supervisor at Man Met) at r.dickinson@mmu.ac.uk or 0161 247 5411.

Will you taking part in the study be kept confidential?

If required by you, anonymity will be ensured in any publications or conference papers inspired by the project.

Your data will be securely stored and disposed of in accordance with university policy as outlined above.

What will happen if you don't carry on with the study?

If you chose to withdraw from the study at any point there will be no consequences to you. I will destroy any data you provided in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

When completed, the thesis will be available to the public through library catalogues.

The thesis may be published in full or in part as a monograph or in publications such as academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. Email me at:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk

What happens next?

If you are happy with the information provided and wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

If you do not wish to be involved in the project then thank you for reading this document, I respect your decision.

Researcher contact details:

Dominika Wielgopolan

1-17 Seeley Building, Man Met Cheshire, Email:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk, Phone: (0)161 247 5176

This investigation was granted ethical approval by Manchester Metropolitan University.

Participant Information Sheet – For Wyre Community Land Trust board members (23/06/2018, Version 1)

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire

Name of Study: Ruskinian Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Past, Present and Future

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Introduction

I'm Dominika Wielgopolan, a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met), Cheshire. I'm working on my doctoral thesis *Ruskinian Sustainability: Past, Present and Future* which is about Ruskin's ideas about communities and the environment as expressed in his *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Labourers and Workmen of Great Britain* (published 1870-1884). My PhD thesis is interested in how those nineteenth century ideas have been interpreted and applied by Ruskin's followers since they were first expressed in *Fors Clavigera*. I chose Ruskin Land, Bewdley as my case study because it is the only Ruskinian community with a history of almost continuous activity since the land was gifted to Ruskin in the 19th century. Part of this requires me to talk to people involved with Ruskin Land.

What is the purpose of the study?

Through this study I hope to find out which of Ruskin's instructions and plans outlined in *Fors Clavigera* have been replicated by settlers on Ruskin Land - since the 19th century to the present – and through this, to evaluate the relevance of his ideas to people in the present and future. My overall thesis concentrates on Ruskin's environmental thought and ideas on living sustainable lives. Ruskin envisaged that small communities would work and live together making 'some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.96) and through talking to you and others involved with Ruskin Land, I hope to see if this has been achieved at Ruskin Land and how. Ruskin imagined that settlers on his land would be families only, but this has not been so at Ruskin Land since the 1930s and yet the area survived and is more active now, than possibly ever before. Thus, I also aim to understand what makes a community and why people come together to look after nature if it is not to support themselves from it.

Why have you been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a board member of the Wyre Community Land Trust. There may be up to 10 more participants like you in this study.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. I will send you the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form in advance by email, so that you can familiarise yourself with them and decide if you're happy to take part in my study. At that time you will be made aware of my proposed visit dates to Ruskin Land where our discussion will take place. On my visit dates, I will ask you to sign the Consent Form to show you agree to take part and then the discussion can take place. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen if you take part?

If you choose to take part in this study, I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of these set questions (some of them may be more relevant to you than others).

1. How long have you been (or were) involved with Ruskin Land for?
2. What were your reasons for getting involved?
3. How would you describe your role here?
4. Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land? In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?
5. How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?
6. Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: 'pure Air, Water, and Earth' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.90). What is your opinion on that?
7. Does the word 'sustainability' mean anything to you? If so, what?
8. What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?
9. Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?
10. What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

I will write down our discussion as it takes place either in a notebook or typed on a laptop.
I may also, with your permission, audio record our discussion.

I will not take any photographs of, or film any of the participants. I may photograph, with permission, locations in and around Ruskin Land.

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

If you would prefer, your answers will be anonymised. In that case, no identifying information will be included in my thesis, other than that which you have consented to provide.
If, then, at any point in our discussion you disclose information which might identify you, I will ask you if you wish this identifying information to be struck from my records.

I may also use this data, either in full or in part, in publications inspired by this project, for example in academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

All hard paper/audio recorded data will be stored in a locked cabinet, either within a locked university office or at my home, accessed only by me. Electronic data will be stored on any of the following: my Man Met networked computer, my Man Met external hard drive, my own memory stick. All of these will be password protected with a password known only by me.

I will retain all data for a maximum of 10 years after graduating from Man Met with my PhD.
After this time, I will dispose of all data (in paper or electronic format) in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will you have to do?

You will be asked to read a Participant Information Sheet.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of the set questions in the section above (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I have identified no disadvantages or risks to your participation.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study before or after meeting me, you should speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions (0162 247 5176 or dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk).

If you wish to complain or comment on my conduct, you can contact Dr Rachel Dickinson (my supervisor at Man Met) at r.dickinson@mmu.ac.uk or 0161 247 5411.

Will you taking part in the study be kept confidential?

If required by you, anonymity will be ensured in any publications or conference papers inspired by the project.

Your data will be securely stored and disposed of in accordance with university policy as outlined above.

What will happen if you don't carry on with the study?

If you chose to withdraw from the study at any point there will be no consequences to you. I will destroy any data you provided in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

When completed, the thesis will be available to the public through library catalogues.

The thesis may be published in full or in part as a monograph or in publications such as academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. Email me at:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk

What happens next?

If you are happy with the information provided and wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

If you do not wish to be involved in the project then thank you for reading this document, I respect your decision.

Researcher contact details:

Dominika Wielgopolan

1-17 Seeley Building, Man Met Cheshire, Email:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk, Phone: (0)161 247 5176

This investigation was granted ethical approval by Manchester Metropolitan University.

Participant Information Sheet – For Wyre Community Land Trust staff (23/06/2018, Version 1)

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire

Name of Study: Ruskinian Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Past, Present and Future

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Introduction

I'm Dominika Wielgopolan, a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met), Cheshire. I'm working on my doctoral thesis *Ruskinian Sustainability: Past, Present and Future* which is about Ruskin's ideas about communities and the environment as expressed in his *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Labourers and Workmen of Great Britain* (published 1870-1884). My PhD thesis is interested in how those nineteenth century ideas have been interpreted and applied by Ruskin's followers since they were first expressed in *Fors Clavigera*. I chose Ruskin Land, Bewdley as my case study because it is the only Ruskinian community with a history of almost continuous activity since the land was gifted to Ruskin in the 19th century. Part of this requires me to talk to people involved with Ruskin Land.

What is the purpose of the study?

Through this study I hope to find out which of Ruskin's instructions and plans outlined in *Fors Clavigera* have been replicated by settlers on Ruskin Land - since the 19th century to the present – and through this, to evaluate the relevance of his ideas to people in the present and future. My overall thesis concentrates on Ruskin's environmental thought and ideas on living sustainable lives. Ruskin envisaged that small communities would work and live together making 'some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.96) and through talking to you and others involved with Ruskin Land, I hope to see if this has been achieved at Ruskin Land and how. Ruskin imagined that settlers on his land would be families only, but this has not been so at Ruskin Land since the 1930s and yet the area survived and is more active now, than possibly ever before. Thus, I also aim to understand what makes a community and why people come together to look after nature if it is not to support themselves from it.

Why have you been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a staff member of the Wyre Community Land Trust. There may be up to 5 more participants like you in this study.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. All staff will be emailed this Participant Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form by the WCLT board members. WCLT staff will at that time be made aware of my proposed visit dates. On my visit dates, I will ask you to sign the Consent Form to show you agree to take part and then the discussion can take place. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen if you take part?

If you choose to take part in this study, I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of these set questions (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

1. How long have you been (or were) involved with Ruskin Land?
2. What were your reasons for getting involved?
3. How would you describe your role here?
4. Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land? In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?
5. How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?
6. Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: 'pure Air, Water, and Earth' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.90). What is your opinion on that?
7. Does the word 'sustainability' mean anything to you? If so, what?
8. What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?
9. Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?
10. What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

I will write down our discussion as it takes place, either in a notebook or typed on a laptop.
I may also, with your permission, audio record our discussion.

I will not take any photographs of, or film any of the participants. I may photograph, with permission, locations in and around Ruskin Land.

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

If you would prefer, your answers will be anonymised. In that case, no identifying information will be included in my thesis, other than that which you have consented to provide.

If, then, at any point in our discussion you disclose information which might identify you, I will ask you if you wish this identifying information to be struck from my records.

I may also use this data, either in full or in part, in publications inspired by this project, for example in academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

All hard paper/audio recorded data will be stored in a locked cabinet, either within a locked university office or at my home, accessed only by me. Electronic data will be stored on any of the following: my Man Met networked computer, my Man Met external hard drive, my own memory stick. All of these will be password protected with a password known only by me.

I will retain all data for a maximum of 10 years after graduating from Man Met with my PhD. After this time, I will dispose of all data (in paper or electronic format) in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will you have to do?

You will be asked to read a Participant Information Sheet.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of the set questions in the section above (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I have identified no disadvantages or risks to your participation.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study before or after meeting me, you should speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions (0162 247 5176 or dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk).

If you wish to complain or comment on my conduct, you can contact Dr Rachel Dickinson (my supervisor at Man Met) at r.dickinson@mmu.ac.uk or 0161 247 5411.

Will you taking part in the study be kept confidential?

If required by you, anonymity will be ensured in any publications or conference papers inspired by the project.

Your data will be securely stored and disposed of in accordance with university policy as outlined above.

What will happen if you don't carry on with the study?

If you chose to withdraw from the study at any point there will be no consequences to you. I will destroy any data you provided in accordance with Man Met procedures. To do so contact…

What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

When completed, the thesis will be available to the public through library catalogues.

The thesis may be published in full or in part as a monograph or in publications such as academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. Email me at:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk

What happens next?

If you are happy with the information provided and wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

If you do not wish to be involved in the project then thank you for reading this document, I respect your decision.

Researcher contact details:

Dominika Wielgopolan

1-17 Seeley Building, Man Met Cheshire, Email:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk, Phone: (0)161 247 5176

This investigation was granted ethical approval by Manchester Metropolitan University.

Participant Information Sheet – For Wyre Community Land Trust volunteers (23/06/2018, Version 1)

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire

Name of Study: Ruskinian Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Past, Present and Future

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Introduction

I'm Dominika Wielgopolan, a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University (Man Met), Cheshire. I'm working on my doctoral thesis *Ruskinian Sustainability: Past, Present and Future* which is about Ruskin's ideas about communities and the environment as expressed in his *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Labourers and Workmen of Great Britain* (published 1870-1884). My PhD thesis is interested in how those nineteenth century ideas have been interpreted and applied by Ruskin's followers since they were first expressed in *Fors Clavigera*. I chose Ruskin Land, Bewdley as my case study because it is the only Ruskinian community with a history of almost continuous activity since the land was gifted to Ruskin in the 19th century. Part of this requires me to talk to people involved with Ruskin Land.

What is the purpose of the study?

Through this study I hope to find out which of Ruskin's instructions and plans outlined in *Fors Clavigera* have been replicated by settlers on Ruskin Land - since the 19th century to the present – and through this, to evaluate the relevance of his ideas to people in the present and future. My overall thesis concentrates on Ruskin's environmental thought and ideas on living sustainable lives. Ruskin envisaged that small communities would work and live together making 'some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.96) and through talking to you and others involved with Ruskin Land, I hope to see if this has been achieved at Ruskin Land and how. Ruskin imagined that settlers on his land would be families only, but this has not been so at Ruskin Land since the 1930s and yet the area survived and is more active now, than possibly ever before. Thus, I also aim to understand what makes a community and why people come together to look after nature if it is not to support themselves from it.

Why have you been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are or were a volunteer with the Wyre Community Land Trust. There may be up to 40 more participants like you in this study.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. All volunteers will be emailed this Participant Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form by the WCLT management. Volunteers will at that time be made aware of my proposed visit dates. On my visit dates, I will ask you to sign the Consent Form to show you agree to take part and then the discussion can take place. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen if you take part?

If you choose to take part in this study, I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of these set questions (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

1. How long have you been (or were) involved with Ruskin Land for?
2. What were your reasons for getting involved?
3. How would you describe your role here?
4. Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land? In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?
5. How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?
6. Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: 'pure Air, Water, and Earth' (*Works*, 1906:XXVII.90). What is your opinion on that?
7. Does the word 'sustainability' mean anything to you? If so, what?
8. What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?
9. Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?
10. What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

I will write down our discussion as it takes place, either in a notebook or typed on a laptop.
I may also, with your permission, audio record our discussion.

I will not take any photographs of, or film any of the participants. I may photograph, with permission, locations in and around Ruskin Land.

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

If you would prefer, your answers will be anonymised. In that case, no identifying information will be included in my thesis, other than that which you have consented to provide.
If, then, at any point in our discussion you disclose information which might identify you, I will ask you if you wish this identifying information to be struck from my records.

I may also use this data, either in full or in part, in publications inspired by this project, for example in academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

All hard paper/audio recorded data will be stored in a locked cabinet, either within a locked university office or at my home, accessed only by me. Electronic data will be stored on any of the following: my Man Met networked computer, my Man Met external hard drive, my own memory stick. All of these will be password protected with a password known only by me.

I will retain all data for a maximum of six months after graduating from Man Met with my PhD.
After this time I will dispose of all data (in paper or electronic format) in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will you have to do?

You will be asked to read a Participant Information Sheet.

If you choose to take part in this study you will be asked to sign a consent form.

I will ask you about your work at Ruskin Land over the course of one discussion which will take between 15 and 60 minutes. I will ask some or all of the set questions in the section above (some of them may be more relevant to you than other).

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I have identified no disadvantages or risks to your participation.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study before or after meeting me, you should speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions (0162 247 5176 or dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk).

If you wish to complain or comment on my conduct, you can contact Dr Rachel Dickinson (my supervisor at Man Met) at r.dickinson@mmu.ac.uk or 0161 247 5411.

Will you taking part in the study be kept confidential?

If required by you, anonymity will be ensured in any publications or conference papers inspired by the project.

Your data will be securely stored and disposed of in accordance with university policy as outlined above.

What will happen if you don't carry on with the study?

If you chose to withdraw from the study at any point there will be no consequences to you. I will destroy any data you provided in accordance with Man Met procedures.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use this data in my thesis, either in full or in part. Or I may not use any of your answers.

When completed, the thesis will be available to the public through library catalogues.

The thesis may be published in full or in part as a monograph or in publications such as academic journals, conference papers/proceedings.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. Email me at:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk

What happens next?

If you are happy with the information provided and wish to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

If you do not wish to be involved in the project then thank you for reading this document, I respect your decision.

Researcher contact details:

Dominika Wielgopolan

1-17 Seeley Building, Man Met Cheshire, Email:
dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk, Phone: (0)161 247 5176

This investigation was granted ethical approval by Manchester Metropolitan University.

3. Interviewee's Consent Form

INTERVIEWEE'S CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Ruskinian Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Past, Present and Future

Name of Researcher: Dominika Wielgopolan

Contact Details: Email dominika.wielgopolan@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Phone (0)161 247 5176

Please initial the boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 23/06/2018 (version 1) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐

3. I agree to being interviewed and thus take part in the above study. ☐

4. I require anonymity. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent.	Date	Signature

4. Interview Transcriptions

Participant 1

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P1: Probably about 7 years, 6 to 7 years.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P1: The people who are running Ruskin Land, John and Linda, were friends and I became interested in what they were doing, went up to talk to them, find out what they were doing and why they were doing it. And I became interested because I have quite a feeling for sustainability and the land. Always have done. And I wanted to be able to volunteer to sort of help them along. So it was, I went along to see them and said "Is there anything I can do?" I'm a bit too old to drive in fence posts, so they asked me if I'd help with some of the admin. So I helped the then farm manager, Mark, with some of the admin, just on a volunteer basis.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P1: Here now? Now I'm just a volunteer. I'm also a Companion, and the reason I got involved with that was while I was helping with the admin, the contents of Anthony Page's library was being removed from the house to the Studio and left there. And I realised these books were valuable and needed something doing to them. And John asked me if I would just sort of have a look at them and see. So I started to sort them, realised what the content was, which he hadn't appreciated... I mean, he knew it was a good library, but I don't... it was all just going to be left in cardboard boxes and it's just not a suitable place to have them. So, I started cataloguing them [laughter] and since there were nearly 1000 pieces of material, either books, documents... it took a long time. And I was only doing it part-time, so it took a couple of years really to sort it all. And then I got it onto a spreadsheet... And in sorting of course I then became very involved with Ruskin. Really found out what Ruskin was about rather than the sustainability of the Wyre Community Land Trust. And how it tied up with that. So then I started cataloguing the thing and got it onto a spreadsheet eventually. And then my son, very kindly, put it on the database and got it on the Internet. So I suppose I got involved with Ruskin much more through the library, books that I was handling. I love books anyway. And I'm a real sort of

nosy cat really... So yes, so of course the library, the books that were in the library, covered a *huge* range of Ruskin's work. It was not only all of basic stuff written by Ruskin, plus Collingwood's complete set.... a pretty well complete set of his annotated works... but there were a lot of commentaries, there were a lot of art books in which I was interested, and a lot of, and all of his letters, biographies, comparative biographies, associations with Proust and various other, Morris, and various other, Carlyle, which I haven't read yet. So I realised he was a very, very complicated man. I was interested in his social reform, I worked in that sort of area and was interested in that side of things… I thought, "My goodness, what an enormous polymath this is," apart from the fact that he wrote *Modern Painters*, in which... you know, I was interested in the art side. So that's how I got in touch with Ruskin.

I: So you'd heard of Ruskin through your involvement with art? Before coming to Ruskin Land.

P1: Yes, but very, very briefly. I hadn't read *Unto This Last* or anything like that until I came to Ruskin Land.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P1: Oh, alright... That's fairly easy, I think it's a fantastic project. It's ambitious and it's being handled very well, apart from being chronically short of funds... It's got vision. I fully support its sustainability objects, it's value of the Forest as a working forest, not just as a piece of natural architecture. It's a working forest… It's a working land that should be used sustainably. Not exploited, but used. I think that's an interesting thing actually, the difference between *using* land and exploiting it. And there is a balance there that's got to be kept. And I think, because of Ruskin's influence and because of the way the people who are working there, they know the difference. And so they are trying to spread the word by getting other groups involved, like architecture students. They want to use the timber as profitably as possible to make it sustainable, otherwise the thing will just collapse. But also, by using architecture and art students, and concentrating as well on the art side, and the literature side, they will keep the thing in balance. Hopefully. Money doesn't grow on trees. [sigh] This is the problem, at the moment. But still, let's hope. And they also... the other side of it is, I'm very keen that the local community, the wider

community becomes much more aware of what Ruskin was trying to do. I mean this piece of land is smack in the middle of the Wyre Forest, smack in the middle of a large number of small villages and towns. It's a resource that's not used enough for education. But these feelers are going out and it is happening, slowly. Everybody these days wants everything to happen in a hurry. It won't happen in a hurry, it's going to develop very slowly. But it is happening, the schools are getting involved, the local community is getting involved. Museums are getting involved and through them, their educational programs, it is happening.

I: What about nature in general, how do you feel about that?

P1: Oh well, I've always been very, very keen on the natural world. I think it's totally beautiful and held in balance, which is very fragile, even more fragile these days. I've always gardened, organically. Try not to use, you know, chemicals. I'm a Quaker, so the sort of fundamental truth and beauty and sustainability, and equality, sort of is my natural kind of feeling, so yeah, nature. And of course the beauty. I draw and paint, so, you know, the beauty of nature is second nature really.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live, only three things: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." How do you feel about that?

P1: ...They need those, but they also need human relationships to live.

I: Ah, but he said... this is not the full quotation, perhaps I should have given it in full. He said, people need three immaterial things and three material things...

P1: I see. I got it, yes. Sorry, yes. Pure earth is all right if it is managed properly. Ruskin was *not* an agriculturalist. Simply because the piece of earth looks clean, doesn't mean to say that it will produce food. And in order to produce food, it has to be manured and it has to be looked after. So, as a sort of outlying principle, fine. But… we also need fire, you might add. The other material thing we need is fire, otherwise nothing would happen.

I: OK.

P1: Quirky answers.

I: You mentioned sustainability a few times already, so what does it mean to *you*.

P1: Sustainability means not taking more out of the Earth than you can put back. Well, Earth… I mean, out of the world, out of the air, out of water. At the same

time, not polluting it. If it's polluted with our detritus, then it's not going to be any use to us, it's not sustaining us.

I: You mentioned communities. Maybe we could expand on that. In what way do you think Ruskin Land is… Is it at all important in the local area or the local community?

P1: I think Ruskin Land is important in the local community in two ways. One, is an icon of what could be done elsewhere. It's an example of what could be done elsewhere. I know from experience, because I used to manage a horticultural therapy garden… So I know from my experience, what kind of beneficial effect being able to be actually hands on with earth and plants has on people who are going through a difficult time, maybe permanently, maybe only temporarily. So through my own experience, I know how it works and I think it can also work in people with... who are less disabled, but just their mental health and physical health. The need time in an open space and Ruskin Land can offer that.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P1: I'd like it to be more involved with what I've just spoken about in the way of offering a beneficial effect for community. I'd like it to develop that side of things. I'd also like it to be a resource, a learning resource, so that all the resources of books, of art materials and opportunities for people in the community to use it, with the encouragement of local schools, colleges and museums in the local area. So that it becomes a kind of a museum as Ruskin was thinking about it, but not a museum of dead things, or static things, but a museum of working a sustainable project. And they can see how things work, how animals can work in the land without exploiting it, but using it. Properly. For the good of humans.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P1: Oh dear. I don't know, I think we covered most things… I think it's important that the people who work there, and they always do, present a welcoming public face, that welcomes people in. And they do. I mean, in this volunteer work that is going on, not just within Ruskin Land, but out as well. And I think the good thing is that Kate and the volunteers are managing other projects for other conservation groups, like the Woodland Trust. And that will draw them in, draw the volunteers

in. And I think the fact that we use such a lot of community volunteers, it ripples out. And so, I think more encouragement for volunteers to come and get involved. Probably, when the buildings are all finished up there, and we've got the library up there, we've got, you know, indoor facilities up there for people, I think it would be nice to attract volunteers to use the space, not just to bang fence posts in, but to do something more academic perhaps up there as well.

I: So the library is going to be moved eventually to…

P1: Yes, they want it out now actually, but there's nowhere to put it, I'm not having it back in that building again, 'cause it's not the right place to keep books, in the Studio. The temperature is not good for them and they get animals, moths or whatever they are, book moths or those things that grow in there.

I: Thank you.

Then, the Participant then said there was one question I hadn't asked and she wanted to answer: the impact of Ruskin on her life.

P1: [inaudible] of Ruskin influenced you in your own life in the community. Yeah, I think it does. I suppose it's all tied up with being a Quaker anyway, because we talk about these things, but I think, if I hadn't known much about Ruskin and his ideas it would've… It's expanded my appreciation of art, for one thing. His, particularly his drawing. His concentration on the minutiae of nature has opened my eyes to the importance of that kind of thing. The beauty of some of his drawings, because they are so minutely studied, with an autistic spectrum, that would need that for that detail. Unless you're a botanical painter, but I mean, I think the way that he, he looked at things, that's influenced me. It's influenced me not just in perhaps my own drawing, which I'm pretty hopeless at, but it's also influenced me in the way that I look at nature. So that's one way. And also just generally, having the influence of Ruskin behind you, as far a political economy and all the rest of it. The different way you may look at the political situation, the social situation. You think, "Hmm, hang on" [laughter], "let's get this on an even keel." So yeah, I think it does influence you, so the ripples do spread out.

When the microphone was already switched off, the participant added that she loved nature and had to get out and be in the Forest as often as possible, otherwise she didn't feel “right”.

Participant 2

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P2: With Ruskin Land, I’ve been involved for about two years. I was a colleague of Linda. I’ve known Linda and John for a good long while now, and when I retired, I started working as a volunteer at the place that I had retired from, which was the Discovery Centre in Wyre Forest, which is where I worked with Linda. After a few years of being a volunteer there, things changed quite dramatically and I was becoming less and less happy about what was happening up there. And, rather than feeling that I was putting something back, I was coming away feeling very dissatisfied, and Linda and I would often have a moan about how things were going. So, we both decided, pretty much at the same time, that we’d stop volunteering where we used to work and that we would come and work here. Which was a bit odd for Linda, because she lived here! I didn’t quite know how it was going to work out, but I have to say that I’ve *thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it*, even in the pouring rain, I really look forward to coming up here. It’s a privilege, it’s a privilege to be here and, and to be able to help out.

I: As a volunteer, what kind of helping out are you involved in?

P2: Oh gosh! Well, let me think. We have done some cutting down and clearing of scrub, and bonfires. I love a bonfire. I’ve helped repair the little bridge down at the bottom and helped make some steps there. I’ve helped cut the bracken in the field. And, gosh… Moving logs today, which is what we’ve been doing…

I: So sort of physical work?

P2: Yes. Apple picking. One of the first things I did when I started coming up here was help Linda finish off her pond, her wildlife pond. I’m very into ponds, I love ponds. So that was one of the first things that I did. Yes, there’s all sorts of things. Sometimes we have to move animals around and sometimes we have to clean the barn out, if the animals have been in the barn. Today, if there’d been time, we were going to move the chickens, but I think we’ll probably run out of time today. So,

basically, it's whatever John and Linda want me to do and if I feel capable of doing it then that's what I do. Sometimes it's pruning apple trees, sometimes it's collecting apples, sometimes it's feeding the windfall apples to the pigs… But whatever it is, I feel Linda and John will only ask me to do things that they know that I can do. They would never ask me to do something that I would feel uncomfortable about doing.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P2: I had, yes.

I: Did you know him as an art critic or as something else?

P2: Initially, I knew him as an art critic, but because I'm a local person and I knew the Forest reasonably well, I remember asking my dad what Ruskin Land meant and was it anything to do with John Ruskin. And he said yes, and explained that it was this sort of project if you like, that John Ruskin had got to, to get people to return to a simpler way of life. And so, yes, I had heard about Ruskin and realised then that Ruskin Land and John Ruskin were the same, the same thing.

I: Would you say that involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin and his work?

P2: Gosh that's a difficult one… Because I'd worked for the Forestry Commission and knew about Ruskin and knew about Ruskin Land, I don't think that it has added any more than I already knew. But… I have to say that working up here, I've, I've seen some of the things that John and Linda have done and, perhaps, seeing it in action has meant more than just learning about it in the abstract.

I: How do you feel about the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P2: Gosh. I think if somebody cut me through the middle, I would have the Wyre Forest written all the way through. Wyre Forest to me is like a part of me. It's… If I don't get out into the Forest at least once a week, I feel that something withers in my soul. I need to be outside, I need to be out in the Forest, I love working outside, I love the Forest and, ever since I was a child, I've enjoyed nature and natural history.

I: Perhaps this will be interesting for you: Ruskin said that in life you need only six things and three of them are immaterial, and that's admiration, hope and love. And three of them are material: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P2: One of the things that we used to say to the children that came out to us was, actually we would refer to the four essentials of life, three of which Ruskin mentions there. So it was, it was, light for the trees, for the plants to photosynthesise, water, soil… I can't remember what the fourth one was! [laughter] Having a senior moment. Oh it was air, that's right! Yes, oxygen. Yeah, I do agree with that, but I also think that an interaction with people is quite important, because otherwise you can be a bit isolated, and have ideas, but not connect with anybody. Again, it's this thing about doing something in isolation. So I think people are important as well.

I: I think this was one of the immaterial things that Ruskin meant, love.

P2: Oh I see! Yes, yes, I'm with you.

I: But he would add these… So, I suppose you probably agree with Ruskin to a certain extent…

P2: Oh I think I do, yes!

I: What about the word "sustainability" what does it mean to you?

P2: To me it means only taking what you need, rather than what you want and to make sure that you replace like for like. So that you never run out of anything.

I: What about your objectives at Ruskin Land. You said that you come and help John and Linda with all sorts of physical things to do with the farm and the Forest, but why do you think this area is special? Just Ruskin Land. Or is it special at all?

P2: Yes, I think Ruskin Land is special because of the historical aspect of it. And, for me, because I'm a Christian, I wanted to give back to God. Something… you know, put something of myself back into His world. If that makes sense. To me the whole Forest is special, but it is a real privilege to come and work up here.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P2: Yes, I think it *has*. We've lost an awful lot of the sense of community that there would have once been, and something like the Community Land Trust and Ruskin Land acts as a focus, a hub to bring people back together. Earlier on John was mentioning the gentleman that looks after the sheep here, I know the pigs are owned by the Land Trust and everybody has a share in that. And I think that's how things would have worked, so much more in times past, and we've got away from that. You know, where everybody has a share in a pig, you know, or you've got a

field and you allow cattle to graze it, but then perhaps when the cattle go for slaughter, you get a portion of the, of the meat. And that sort of thing doesn't happen anymore. But here it still does! And, and the Community Land Trust has brought those ideas of Ruskin's back to the centre again. I think it's wonderful, I think it's absolutely wonderful. I wish actually I'd lived in Victorian times… Possibly not their healthcare system, but I think I'm a bit, a bit of an old-fashioned person and I think I would've been a lot happier in olden days.

I: I wonder… life probably was much harder…

P2: I think it probably was!

I: Especially on a farm.

P2: Oh yes, I have no illusions that I would've been, I wouldn't have been a grand lady, I would've definitely been a scullery maid or something like that.

I: But people probably helped each other more, because they had to…

P2: I think so! They had to, didn't they…

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P2: Oh gosh… I don't feel that I know enough really, about what direction I would want it to go in. But speaking personally, the more people that come here, the school groups… The more people that know about what happens here, so the local community… Then the more, I feel, that not just Ruskin Land, not just Uncllys Farm, but the whole Forest will be more valued. The Forest tends to be used as a big playground and people will come and they'll walk their dogs, they will ride their bikes, they'll ride horses through. But, I don't think they are really *looking* at the Forest as a whole. They're, they're not seeing it holistically. It's just somewhere to come and play and that concerns me, because, as time goes on, the people are becoming more and more... divorced, separated from the natural world, particularly children. And this was one of the things that I felt very strongly about when I was working, that I wanted the children who came out to understand what was around them. And… Yes, so the more people that get involved in the Community Land Trust and in things that happen at Ruskin Land, then the more understanding there'll be about the way that the Forest generally is managed I think. Yeah.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P2: Just the fact that nature has always meant a lot to me, even as a small child. And I just find that I'm at my happiest and most content when I'm with like-minded people, who know where I'm coming from [short laugh] and, as I said before, I feel less a person if I haven't been able to get outside and get back to the Forest.

I: You mentioned earlier that knew of this place because you grew up here and you asked your day what Ruskin Land meant. Do you remember anything about what the place was like when you were little?

P2: No, I don't. It was just, I mean, Uncllys was just a place on the map, and I always thought it was a Welsh name, but Linda said it was previously called "Uncle's Farm" and that the name changed to Uncllys, which sounded more Welsh [laughter]. But, I used to walk in the Forest with my mum and dad, but we didn't tend to walk this bit, it was further over, more the Callow Hill side, where the Discovery Centre and everything is. So I didn't really know this bit of the Forest particularly well until I started working here and then I'd go off and explore a little bit. So, yeah… I didn't really know what was here, although I knew of it. Does that make sense?

I: Yes, it does. Thank you.

P2: OK, you're very welcome!

Participant 3

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P3: Since we became, or just before, we became tenants here which was 2004. We'd known Cedric Quayle through the Baptist Church in Bewdley and knew he was the Secretary of the Guild of St. George, but didn't know very much about it. It was Cedric who suggested to us that we might be interested in becoming tenants. So obviously there were some conversations and we came and looked at Uncllys Farm and it went from there. But I wouldn't say we learned much more about Ruskin, or the history of Ruskin Land, not a great deal before we moved in.

I: So, what were your reasons for getting involved? What were your reasons for taking the Farm on?

P3: We both loved the Forest. I worked for the Forestry Commission based in the Wyre Forest and I'd got to know the Forest pretty well, or some areas of it, and loved it. And John loved the Forest too. We both had been involved in conservation for many, many years. Both love nature and landscape. So I think at the back of our minds was a little dream that we didn't expect to be fulfilled: to have our own little bit of land and a farm. Which we certainly couldn't have afforded to buy, but a tenancy was a different matter, something that was affordable.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P3: I think as a steward of Uncllys Farm and its landscape. Looking after it to the best of our abilities. To look after… its nature… Well, by its nature I mean its character and, and the landscape, the wildlife and its historical value as well. And… helping, *especially local people*, to understand what it's all about and appreciate it as well.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P3: I had vaguely heard about him, but I really hadn't known very much about him, he wasn't ever mentioned at school and I was a scientist, I became a scientist, so I, you know, my studies never took me anywhere near Ruskin. So I think I had vaguely understood that he was a Victorian… art critic. I didn't really know about his social opinions and the other things he'd written.

I: In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P3: Well I've certainly learned a bit… an awful lot more [laughter] about Ruskin. We became Companions of the Guild, so got involved with all the events that were going on and, we've… since we've moved here, we've had a lot of visits from people who were involved with the Guild, Jim Dearden and then Clive Wilmer. And so we've been involved in all those conversations. So, I wouldn't say I know an awful lot about him now, I'm certainly not a Ruskin scholar. But I realise the breadth of topics that he wrote and spoke about, and a… the history of the gift of this land to him and what happened afterwards. And I've come to understand a bit about his influence on British life, on landscapes, through the National Trust, national parks and his work on making art and literature and education, available to everyone.

Which we, I suppose we take for granted. But, obviously he had a great influence on starting that up.

I: You mentioned that you were always interested in nature, could you tell me something more about it, how do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P3: I love it! [laughter] Put very succinctly. I think, you know, from my childhood onwards I loved playing outside, I loved our holidays when we went to Cornwall, or down to the coast from London. Or out on walks… I didn't like *walks* when I was a child, I couldn't see the point of walks, but I loved being outside. And I think as I grew up, I came to realise that the countryside was under threat, it was the time of Rachel Carson's writing *Silent Spring* and concerns about pollution. And in my twenties I became involved with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, so at weekends I would very often be off doing conservation work around London. Well, moving from London out to the countryside, but doing all sorts of things: maintaining lakes and planting trees, looking after paths, building steps, all sorts of things. I really enjoyed that. And then I eventually got a job with the Trust—The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers—and that was in Yorkshire. And my career sort of went from there, in landscape management. And then, when we moved to Bewdley, we had our family, and I started work in… when would it be? In… 1993 I think. For the Forestry Commission, and that was an educational role, so teaching all ages, from pre-school to adult… about the Forest through various avenues. Most of the work was with primary schools and was linked to the National Curriculum, so we used to do all kinds of things. But the main purpose of that was to, for people to enjoy the Forest and learn to love it and… to value it.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P3: [laughter] I think that's a very Ruskin thing to say. [laughter] It takes a bit of thinking about. Pure air, obviously. And for pure air we need, we need plenty of plant life on the planet and not too much burning of fossil fuels, pollution. Was it pure earth? Yes… People probably don't value that as much as they should. And now our government is trying to turn that around and get people to look after soil much better, because farming practices have tended to destroy soils and cause

erosion. Pure water was the other one, was it? Yeah. Obviously, we need that as well. I think, you know, they are elemental things and if they're right, then it gives a chance the other things to be right as well, but we also… It's not just those things that we need, we need to look after habitats. So you could have your pure air, pure earth and pure water, but if you haven't got the plants and animals that go to make up the different habitats on them, we will still be destroyed by our own actions [laughter].

I: Perhaps he meant that this is all that's needed for food production and, after all, food is the only thing we *really* need.

P3: Yeah, yeah… Disagree. [laughter]

I: Does the word 'sustainability' mean anything to you? If so, what?

P3: Oh yes, yes. [carefully] It means only taking what can be replaced by the natural systems. So mining coal is not sustainable. Intensive beef production is not sustainable, because… well, certainly not at the scale it is on in the world now. It depends on destruction of forest to produce soybeans et cetera, maize and things like that. It produces waste products that can't easily be disposed of. So, yeah.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?

P3: I think it's special because it's an oasis of… low input farming. [Not] extensive farming, in other words. Which it is certainly difficult for anyone to make any money off these days, but it's questionable whether it is truly sustainable, even as we do it. But it is much closer to sustainability than intensive farming. It's also an oasis of peace and quiet. And people, you would think the people who live in Bewdley, living in a rural area, were in tune with the landscape, and they're not. I mean every… nearly the whole population of this country is urban in its attitudes and outlook these days and our friends and visitors from Bewdley even, you know, even them, and just the people from big towns and cities, come to Uncllys and say "Wow, this is amazing." It's a world on its own, it's a completely different world and… It is just *so* peaceful, it's so natural… At night it's dark, there's hardly any light pollution, just a little bit of a glow in the eastern sky. The sounds are nearly always the sounds of nature rather than traffic. So it's, it's a kind of sanctuary and I think people who are having difficulties of various kinds find it a good place to be.

I: You already mentioned Bewdley a little, do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P3: Yes, I think so, I think it's one of the things that builds up communities, it's an awareness of its history and the things that'd been important in the past and are important to different groups of people. And I think Bewdley does have a very good sense of community, but… I think the awareness of what Ruskin Land is and who Ruskin was are getting better, through the efforts of the Guild and the Bewdley Museum, and I think that's a very good thing. Schoolchildren aren't taught about the Victorian age very much at the moment, I don't think. I think women's suffrage comes into it, but that comes a bit later. But I think there's a sort of a general ignorance about that period and about Ruskin himself. Some have seen *Turner* and *Effie*, *Effie Gray* and that's all they know about Ruskin [laughter].

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P3: I want it to remain what it is, I want it to be a haven of beauty and peace and a place that can refresh people. I think it's good what's going on at St. George's Farm, with the Community Land Trust using the oak from the Forest in ways that increase its value. And the involvement of volunteers in the place, I think it's terrific, because a lot of people have this yearning to be involved in the countryside, and that's an outlet for that and also a very good social project as well. I think, I think I'd like to see it go in, carry on in the direction it's going, you know, so more… more involvement of children, families, adults in things to do with nature, conservation, art, craft… beauty. But it'll never be the kind of place that can welcome large numbers to it, because of it, you know, it's just that would spoil it [laughter]. And it is inaccessible and that's why it is unspoiled.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P3: I think, I think the natural world was obviously important to Ruskin and the, the Ruskin Land experiment was the result of that… There aren't many people living in Ruskin Land now, but I think the cooperation between the different people and families is very important, and that's something we can build on over the years. It would be great if every tenant felt they were part of what was going on here, and could work together. I think there's quite a lot of cooperation now between all the

different people involved. It's a wonderful place to live, I do feel very lucky to have an opportunity to live here and I just hope it carries on being looked after by all the subsequent tenants who live here.

I: Do you think this cooperation between tenants… does it matter if the tenants are Companions? Because, as far as I know, it's only the two of you at the moment who are Companions.

P3: I think being a Companion is a helpful thing, because you do learn a lot more about the breadth of all the projects and the interests of the Guild, and I think that that brings people into the whole movement. I think our relations with the other folk who live in Ruskin Land are, could be described as just trying to be good neighbours. I think… I'm not sure how interested they are in getting involved in Ruskinian things and the activities of the Guild of St. George. But I think that would be a nice thing for them, something I'd like to see happen.

I: Thank you.

Participant 4

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P4: Well, we moved from the centre of Bewdley to Uncllys Farm in July 2004, so you could say, since then to the present day. Although when we moved here, we were not really that aware of Ruskin Land as it were, that was just a name on the map relating to St. George's Farm. And since that time, we've sort of broadened out the idea of what, that Ruskin Land is taken to mean all the Guild's land holdings in the Wyre Forest here. That includes Uncllys Farm, the Bungalow, St. George's Farm and the woodland.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved or moving to Uncllys?

P4: That was awfully simple really, we'd always, Linda and I always had a dream of taking on a smallholding, or having a bit of woodland and indeed in 1995-96, something like that, our neighbour Cedric Quayle, who was the Guild Secretary, I think had mentioned to us that the tenancy was coming up then. But our children at that time were only sort of six or seven and it's a long way for them to walk to school, and where we were living in Bewdley they could walk to school. So when the opportunity, he mentioned in 2003 that the tenancy might be coming up

because the previous tenants, Gill and… the Meehans, Gill and Dave, Dave had had a stroke and that'd left him, his left hand he couldn't use so much. And so Cedric said it was likely that they'd be moving out and would we be interested. And we thought, "oh gosh, no, we're too old." But, after we sort of walked around the place, we thought, "come on, we're not going to get another chance like this." 'Cause we couldn't afford to buy a property like this, so renting it was the obvious thing to do.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P4: I've had lots of different roles really. The first one has been a role of, I suppose you could call it a restorer, or an enabler to actually get the house liveable again. When we moved here it was pretty uninhabitable, the previous tenants had been very poor, they hadn't got any money to invest in the property and so we just had to strip everything out. So the first thing we did was to get the place habitable and I think, you know, there's been a continuous thread of restoration. So we initially started with the house, then we put our attention to the land because the meadows had been neglected, the grazing that they need to maintain wildflowers and, you know, the species-rich grassland really hadn't happened and the tenants had got an old horse and four or five Jacob sheep and it just wasn't enough to graze the land. So yeah, a restorer. And then I suppose after that came "Okay, so what is this place and what should we encourage it to become?" And it's very easy to sort of think well what's the sort of Victorian, you know, model that we should adopt here. Well, that's not really relevant, we don't live in Victorian times, we live in a different age. So the next thing was to, we sought out some energy supply; for years these properties had lived off diesel generators, which are messy, noisy, polluting, unreliable. All of the above. And so we spent £22,000 on solar panels and an electrical system, so that we could get our kids out of bed in the morning and get them off to school! We fitted a gas central heating boiler, you know, as well as the solid fuel system. So there's a lot technical input to it. And then, having got the house, and the farm sort of ticking along… My background, along with Linda's, has always been around sort of conservation and volunteering, so it wasn't long, before we started roping in… In fact the day we moved in we had a gang of our friends here, stripping wallpaper, ripping out carpets… So we've always been people who

engage, you know, who invite friends and community in. And so we had regular work parties here, our friends. And fairly soon I got, started getting approached by people who had got various mental health issues. One chap, Paul, who'd had a breakdown, and he was off work and I met him through our Church and just said, "Paul, why don't you just come up Fridays and we'll do some fencing together?" 'Cause at that time I was working full time in Birmingham for a firm of solicitors, but I'd take my Fridays off and we'd have a good weekend, blasting away on the farm. And there was another chap, can't remember his name, he was from the Black Country and he'd too had a breakdown and he dug all the manure to fill all raised beds in the garden. And after that he felt better and on he went. So there was that thing sort of going on. So that sort of developed a bit into what you now know as the Wyre Community Land Trust in that as soon as I got cattle here and we started grazing our meadows, the people at English Nature as they were then called, now Natural England, started to take quite and interest. And I got on very well with a manager here, chap called Tim Dixon and he said, "Look, we're having a real struggle trying to find anyone to graze our meadows. Could we pay you to do it?" I thought, "Not sure about that." But, at the same time a chap called Mark Cleaver, it's another story in itself, how his wife chatted me up on the train to get Mark a job. And Mark had a lot of experience managing conservation grazing projects and so he came on the board, working part-time, so we were able to say "Yes, we'll graze your meadows." Because again, without the grazing, the meadows would just go rank grass and be horrible. But, and this is where my sort of legal experience with Anthony Collins came in, I thought I *really* don't want to do all this personally as an individual, or as Uncllys Farm. So we'll set up a trust, the Wyre Community Land Trust and then, if there's contracts, or agreements, or people to employ, it's all done through the Trust. Because, you know, when we moved in, 2004, you know, I was in my fifties and you've always got to be thinking about succession. And I've seen too many examples of projects get going and they're build around an individual and then that individual either can't let go or won't let go and that stifles the next set of development. So, we've been a bit of a pioneer here. I've tried to bring lots of things I've learned over my life to bear, I've always been quite good at getting funding organised for things, so getting grants and things like that, so yeah.

And then I ended up as a, yeah, running the Community Land Trust for a while… Another question!

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P4: Yes I had. And I wouldn't say I knew Ruskin much, but I'd got this sort of, I suppose, fairly socialist, left-wing idea of some of his ideas. I'd read some of the books from the Ruskin Press I think they called themselves, which were for me very interesting history books but written from a social history point of view. I remember one called *Miners, Quarrymen and Salt Workers*, which was, you know, had quite a lot about your neck of the woods, up Cheshire where salt was mined, and it was written from the perspective of the workers. Another one, which was written about the... sort of folks, peasants I suppose you should call them, around Oxford, the women who took in washing from the colleges, which was called *Village Life and Labour* and it paints a very rich picture of their awful conditions for many of them. So I'd kind of got this thing behind me of, you know, Ruskin a guy with a social conscience with some thoughts. And that's about as far as it got until our interview when we were being interviewed to see whether we could take on the tenancy here. And that was in May 2004 with Jim Dearden, Cedric Quayle and Daniel Lovatt who was a local estate agent acting for the Guild. And Jim's first question, in fact virtually the first question of the interview, was "Tell me what you know about Ruskin!" [booming voice]. So we managed to sort of blether our way through a bit. No I think… I've just got the idea that there was this guy who, who'd written some sensible stuff. 'Cause I'm vaguely left of centre… I suppose in the old days you'd call me a bit of a socialist! But, yeah, I thought that resonates.

I: In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P4: I think mostly that's come through the Guild…. Because in 2006, I think probably in 2005, Cedric took me down to London to one of the Guild board meetings and I got on extremely well with Janet Barnes in particular, Michael Wheeler, Clive Wilmer, Peter Miller… And after that they invited me to come and be a Director. I mean they hardly knew me from Adam, but I suppose they got, thought "This guy seems to know what he's on about at Uncllys now, that's good." And I know Cedric was starting to look for a successor for his responsibilities. And yeah, walked into it.

Thought it was very weird, some of the stuff. And… over recent years we've done a lot to try and attract younger people, more women, you know, into the Guild and have positions of responsibility on the Board. I wouldn't say... I still don't know Ruskin that well and I've tried reading some of his books but it's just, I don't know… life's too short [laughter].

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P4: Oh it's wonderful. It is probably one of *the* most important areas of ancient, semi-natural oak woodland in, in the UK. Ruskin Land has been a bit of a sleepy backwater, which is fantastic in many regards, 'cause there's lots of things here that, if it had been a busier place for many years, the wildlife would have taken off. And so, we've got to manage it in this sort of careful juxtaposition of yes, you want to encourage more involvement and more people assisting it, but you make it too busy, too noisy, the wildlife will not be here. And we have a fantastic opportunity here, because we are not bound with so much statutory stuff as our neighbours, Natural England and Forestry Commission. We've got a very benign and supportive landowner in the Guild, which isn't pressing to make massive profits out of it for example, so we can steward it very carefully and hopefully, do something very good here.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P4: I can't disagree with that at a sort of physical level, but I think human beings are also emotional creatures and they need company, they need love, you know, they need…

I: Well, these were the immaterial things… he split things that people into two groups, immaterial, and these were love, hope and admiration, and material things, air, water and earth…

P4: Yeah, yeah, I can't disagree. But you also need fire. When you look at the elements, the basic elements, you usually have to include fire there 'cause you can't cook up much with just air, water…

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you? If so, what?

P4: Yep. And essentially, I'd go with the definition which says sustainability means we don't screw up for the future, for our children. You know, as a father, I am very

aware of that and the challenges that my children face. I'll be dead before, well, we're starting to see the signs of climate change now, I mean when it really hits in 50 years' time I won't be around… But sustainability *here* means a lot of things really, 'cause it's about managing the woodland in a way that is more sustainable, so that it, you've got a cycle of new trees coming through to replace the old ones. Which really wasn't happening because of the deer pressure, the lack of engagement with woodland management. I mean, I think what a lot of people don't appreciate about this Forest is it is not a… it's not *natural,* it's all been managed and as the decades and centuries have gone by, mankind has managed it for different reasons. So, when you see photographs of the woodland during its, the heyday of its production for charcoal, you don't get big trees. There's, you know, very few trees much taller than, you know, 10-12 feet high. So, that charcoal production through coppicing was sustainable for charcoal production, but it wasn't very sustainable if you wanted high-quality oak to make furniture. So, we've got to push in on the word "sustainability" and see just what it means really in terms of energy, travel, you know, all sorts of aspects of it. And our challenges for the woodland in terms of it being sustainable, is that… the biggest challenge is probably grey squirrels, because this woodland has grown up to this height at a time before the grey squirrel arrived. Now we've got grey squirrels, if you go, if you walk around the Forest, you'll see trees that are 10-12 years old ring-barked, so they will never grow into these majestic oaks we've got now.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?

P4: I think it's got to be very multidisciplinary. It's a safe place to bring people with different interests with the most, the highest order priority is the fact that it is a National Nature Reserve, you know and it is unique. So you can't mess about with it too much, you know, you've got to be very careful and cautious. So it's a bit like… I have to say that to my Guild colleagues who are much more into art and things, that, you know, if you had too many picnics on a beautiful wildflower meadow… it's a bit like taking a… you know, you wouldn't eat your dinner off a Turner, would you? You know? So, you've got to respect that. And some of the wildlife here is incredibly fragile. We've just got remnants of stuff. So we've got to do things that

don't jeopardise that in any way. So once you've got that okay, it's then to bring people here who are gonna benefit from it, so whether that's because there are mental health issues, to get some physical exercise, they want to express themselves artistically, whether in drawing or painting or writing… At the moment I think we're still very, very early days of pushing the arts side of things and the creativity. The focus of the Community Land Trust, the clue's in the title. It's land management activity, which was very important to manage meadows and woodlands and things like that, but that other latent side, which is about people writing and stuff, has yet to come through. So my role in that is to let go really, I've had my time. I'm just a, hopefully, an old, wise sage on the tap line.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P4: Very much so. It's starting to develop a fond, you know, a fondness, a warmth. Because we aren't quite so bound as the government agencies that own land either side, we can experiment a bit more, we can have weird structures in the Forest, we can have picnics, we can have poetry, we can do all sorts of things… at the same time as managing the land. Yeah, so I think it has quite a role to play. At the same time, it mustn't get, as I've said earlier on, too busy, because that will kill off the beauty that is here. So when we sort of push on the beautiful, fruitful, you know, peaceful, it's a balance, to keep those things.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P4: I'd like to get it… That the people who live here… That there's more of a sense of community. That is happening. And I think we probably need to build a few more houses to have… Because for the folks, particularly for the younger folks working for the Community Land Trust they, it's really difficult renting housing round here. And then they have to commute in, which again, is not terribly sustainable. And I feel they lose some of the benefit of being here, 'cause at 5 o'clock they go off to a town to live, whereas 5 o'clock is a time of great peace and tranquillity and you know, the day just sort of breathing out a bit and… just going beautifully peaceful and… So I think, to share that privilege of living here with a few more folks, who, who are working here. I've never quite got hold of what Ruskin's idea was for a Utopian community, and obviously there was discussions at Mulberry Cottage and places like that, just how that would work out.

I: He didn't quite… he didn't like using the word "Utopia," because he didn't think it was a Utopia, he thought it was a very real possibility.

P4: Right.

I: He thought that people would be able to support themselves, be self-sufficient pretty much but live in family groups and start those helpful communities, but I don't know if he really thought about what this would involve, the hard work and whether the land was actually able to support, sustain people... he wanted the worst land possible to prove a point.

P4: Yeah. Well, he got it! Probably. And we have to remember, you see, that Uncllys Farm and the woodland did not belong to the Guild until 1930, so the Ruskin Land we're talking about up until 1930 was St. George's Farm. And that soil there is pretty grim, it's waterlogged, it's heavy clay, so even re-planting the orchard there, we've had quite mixed success, you know, it hasn't all taken terribly well. So the idea you could make a living off it… And then the Quayles, who moved down here from Liverpool, could probably only afford to live here because Cedric Quayle's grandfather had retired. Presumably, he had some income, or savings, to live off.

I: Would you say the soil is really bad only in the Forest and the further you go away, the better the soil quality? Some people have said the Wyre Forest is surrounded by fertile soils…

P4: It's better, but if you look at it, most of it is pasture land, which is, is good for grazing, but isn't terribly productive. You know, you can't plough it and get a crop. If you go the other side of the River Severn, to the east of Bewdley, you're on sandstones and it's much lighter soil so you can plough it and grow crops on it. When we, we were looking here, I mean we couldn't have afforded to live here if I hadn't got a job in Birmingham and Linda had a job with the Forestry Commission. Now the Farm makes a loss every year. Now, we augment, reduce the loss by doing things like education visits and events and things like that… which isn't your average farmer's activity.

I: So even today with everything at our disposal, this is not a farm that could support a family.

P4: No.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P4: Well, we've been here 14 years now, the place's taught us a lot. And I think anyone coming here… You need to come with sufficient humility to let Ruskin Land speak to you and teach you and, you know, to be flexible. I think if you come here with very fixed ideas, you'll soon get a bloody nose [laugher]. Right, well, I hope we'll live here for many, many more years to come.

I: You said that you have to let Ruskin Land speak to you, do you mean that the Forest takes priority over what you intend for it and you can experiment and see which things would work?

P4: Yeah. And you cannot… you can't buck the seasons. The march of the seasons is relentless. We know that when we get into November, we get a lot of rain, we witnessed that this morning. So anything that involved sort of getting into the Forest and carrying heavy things, with tractors and that, is now difficult, because you really don't wanna chew up the tracks, 'cause they get soft and all this. The apples are coming to an end, so if you want apples to store next week, forget it! You should've done that three weeks ago. So, as years go by, you try and get on to that season earlier and earlier, at least be prepared for it, so you're… I mean, example: I used to fix my haymaking equipment the day before I needed it in June or July or something like that. Now I've done it when I've just finished haymaking, so it's ready for next year. Different people, different psychology, that sort of stuff.

I: You had never owned or managed a smallholding before moving to Uncllys, so all you learned you learned in practice in here?

P4: That's not entirely true. I think a big influence on why I felt, why we felt we wanted to do… was my grandfather who, he managed three farms in East Anglia, at an estate called Iverden. He was the land agent for the owner, Lord Iver, who came from the Guinness family. And I, as a kid, I used to go visit the farms in my summer holidays. So dead keen on tractors and my grandfather would take me out and show me, 'cause the soils over there are very light, very sandy, so he'd show me the shelter belts he planted, a lot of them Scots pine to sort of slow the winds down, 'cause otherwise the soil just blows away. So that was quite a strong conservation ethic he'd got. And then at school I was very involved with Scouts and I helped look

after a Scout camp down in East Sussex called Broadstone Warren, so we did forestry there… I was teaching a forestry course when I was 16. And we had to learn 20 trees and how to spot them in the winter and know their Latin names. So that sort of got put into me when I was sort of 15-16. And then after that, Linda and I spent a lot of time in the Conservation Volunteers where I was a tutor for things like drystone walling, hedge-laying, planting thousands of threes in the North of England… So, practical stuff, we'd kind of done that. And then a friend of Linda's when she was at college, Judith Garner, she, they took on a smallholding in the Lake District and we used to farm-sit for them when they went off on holiday. That was only tiny! But, you know, you had to look after the cattle and the sheep, and the chickens and things like that. So, and with all those sort of rural skills, I mean the attitude I'd taken throughout my life was 'It can't be that difficult!' because ordinary people did them! We have a tendency in this day and age to make things a bit too specialised and a bit too academic can I say? You make a degree subject out of things that are clearly not, they're vocational. And so, a firm belief that this is only simple stuff really, a degree of naivety, and then when you know you don't know, call in someone who does. In the rural sector, generally, there's not, we're not terribly renowned for collaboration. So what we're doing through the Land Trust, again, is quite unique, getting land owners to collaborate with each other. In France, it's different, they form co-ops, no problem at all, buy equipment, share it… Whereas here, everybody wants their own stuff, so it's a cultural thing. So yeah [shrug], it's a small farm. What if anything goes wrong? As long as you don't hurt animals, it's not a big deal.

Participants 5, 6, 7 and 8

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P5: About 18 months I would say I've been here. Maybe a bit longer than that.

P7: 2.5 years.

P6: About a year.

P8: About a year.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P5: I previously, in fact still have, a volunteer job elsewhere restoring furniture. It was completely different from my previous employment, I used to work in computer systems. Largely the motor industry, the vast majority of my time, but the last 5 years or so in the NHS. So working in wood was quite different and I enjoyed it. It was tactile, you've got something really to show for it, something productive as opposed to an elegantly turned out report that nobody was going to read, maybe. And Kate advertised opportunities here in our local free newspaper, which comes out every month, *The Cleobury Clarion*. And I thought, "That's interesting, I will find out what it's about." And I wasn't just interested in the carpentry side, I was also interested in the conservation side, but I hadn't pursued that at all. I was sort of running out of time, life is a bit full, so I just concentrating on this [laughter]. And it's great, I've really enjoyed it. Met some very nice people: Phil…

P7: Yeah, I worked for the local community. Community housing. They all came, came and bought a lot of properties and that's what I used to do. Doing them up. Now I'm retired, and I thought, well… I'd seen the advert, like David here, in *The Bridge*, that's a Bewdley magazine, *The Bridge*, you may have seen that? To do with the area and what's happening in Bewdley. And that's how I came up here.

P8: I came here to learn about woodworking. I was looking for something to do and I met good people here [laughter], so I'm happy to continue coming.

P6: I was a farmer and they were reputed to work in Baler twine and [inaudible], but I've got quite an interest in steelwork where you add, weld and add. But then I thought, hang on, there's another world, of wood, which you subtract from essentially, you cut bits off. And I love wood, it's been… it's an organic thing. And I love it here, where you can cut a tree down, or a tree is cut down, and you end up with this beautiful smooth oak, hearts of oak. It's a traditional, real Ruskin stuff, oak. It rings of Ruskin I think. And I enjoy, and I tell people I enjoy working with wood. And the comradeship of other volunteers, I mean, we banter, we swear at each other, but actually, I'd be quite upset if one left or two left, or three left, or whatever. And we help each other. And when we have a project, we usually… we're given a project, usually without measurement, so we have our committee to decide what it's going to look like. It sort of works.

P7: Yeah.

P6: And then, once we've done one, we can make several.

P5: Then we can put it right! [laughter]

P6: Here's an opportunity, you can see the sort of comradeship about working and nobody really wants to stick their head above the parapet.

P7: Well, it comes from Kate, she says "I've an idea." And we say "Oh boy."

P5: "This could be dangerous."

P6: [pointing to P7] He's our fringe man. He has… You didn't know this, did you? [to P7]. He sort of picks up an idea and goes off at a tangent and works on it. I think.

P7: Quite a variation.

I: How would you describe your role here? How do you see it?

P5: Clearly, we're a) all volunteers, unpaid. So, we're involved in carpentry, we make things the Land Trust think they want, because by our endeavours, I think they try and sell the products that we make, which is a revenue stream for the Land Trust. Whether they successfully sell the things we make, like tables, benches, Christmas…

P7: Bridge at the… Two bridges.

P5: Oh yes, of course, yes. I wasn't involved with that. Well, a little bit. Yes, and so, that's our role. Simply, carpentry.

I: Any other opinions?

P8: No.

P6: I think, promote the Trust. I do that. I was at a meeting last night, and they said "What about the Wyre Forest?", and then I… I talked for too long, I can't believe it. [laughter] But not really… Advocating what we do here. And I think now we're learning about what's happening here, way of looking after the Forest, a neglected forest which needs bringing back. But how you do it and in different time scales that they've got here and the trees and us. It's all different. And trying to make them all work together. So the three lives 300 years and we'd only live a hundred years, somewhere there's a way of combining that. In the work I'm doing in the village, I'm looking at, I've started a small group looking at what it'll look like in a hundred years' time. That's fascinating actually. You know, the village will be twice as large, the school will be three times the size… What's it going to look like, so how

can we… With trees, which span that gap, 200, 300 years, you can plan, and I'm planning what I call "skyline trees," which will stand on the top of a slope, which won't do anything for a hundred years, but after that will stand there, be a memorial. Not to me, but to the community.

P5: There's another, minor, thing. In a way, I'm spreading the word. I'm a peculiar demographic [laughter], a pensioner who has 10-year old twins. Both of them have been here on these wonderful courses that occasionally get ran with our craftsperson, Alice. I don't know her surname, but she's excellent. And they've enjoyed the courses they've attended. In fact, last week, I brought, it was half-term here, I brought Leo along and he helped all day, whilst we were here. He thoroughly enjoyed it.

P8: He seemed to be enjoying himself.

P5: That's right.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin Land before you got involved?

P5: No.

P6: No.

P7: No.

P8: No.

I: What about Ruskin?

P6: Yes.

P7: Yes.

P5: Yes. Isn't there also a college named after him?

I: **There's Ruskin Anglia University…**

P5: Oh yes, of course! But I was thinking of Ruskin…

I: So would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of John Ruskin?

P7: No, no.

P8: It did for me. I started with absolutely no knowledge about this person and I've learned quite a lot.

I: Willingly or unwillingly? [laughter]

P8: Yes, willingly. So, I think when the students were here, there were some presentations, I went to one about Ruskin. There was a lady who was extremely

passionate about him, so after the presentation I heard her talking a bit about it and I then did some reading on the internet to understand what was going on. But it was about six months after I started coming here.

I: So that was last summer, when the presentations were given?

P8: Yes.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P5: Great idea. Yes, if you can… Ideas about how you make a forest sustainable seem to be evolving. I mean I know nothing about forests really, to be honest. I know about bits and bytes and that's it. But yeah, the clearing out, felling trees, getting the canopy less… so the sunlight gets on the ground to get all the fungi growing, and they're wonderful as well, apparently. It seems to be the way the Forest, and the world, is evolving. Wetlands are also important, not just the forest.

I: So you like the project or the vision that they have here?

P5: Yes, the vision. Whether… I can't comment upon the efficacy of what they're doing, I don't know. But it's seems to be in the right direction. From my ignorant point of view.

P7: Did he plant any more forests or is it just this one?

I: Oh he had a… All the properties were donated, when he asked for this in the 1870s and he got this, he got some cottages in Barmouth. But they were just cottages, there wasn't any land or woodland. He bought a farm in Sheffield, which wasn't a success. And then later, after Ruskin's death, the Guild was given some land in Westmill, I think they still own a few cottages there, there's also a meadow in Sheepscombe. I'm not sure if anybody visits there. So, he did get some land, but he wasn't actually doing anything himself.

P7: So this is the only foresty part he's got?

I: Yes, the only such farm with woodland and orchards and meadows and the only that survived since he was given it. It's been in the possession of the Guild and expanded and still being worked.

P6: And readily identifiable on an OS map.

I: Now yes, as Ruskin Land. What about the Wyre Forest, how do you feel about the Wyre Forest or nature, is it important to you at all?

P7: Oh yes, it's a good thing, isn't it… It draws people in, from outside the area, from Birmingham especially. Birmingham people come down to go in the Forest

I: Tourists?

P7: Yes. They go the Activity Centre at the top and up the cottages up there. They go in the Forest, on the weekend it's chock-a-block with the cars, there's hundreds of cars. We're busy, even in winter people come in the cars.

P5: Walk their dog. Lots of dogs.

P7: Oh yeah. And run. People jog in the forest.

P5: I certainly think forests, nature, parks… Urban parks as well for that matter help people maintain their sanity in this rather mad world. There's nothing better, than going for a walk. Over the hills, over the [inaudible]. Super, super way of… readjusting your thoughts back to that which you perceive to be important, I think.

I: Did you know the Forest before you came to work here as volunteers?

P5: Oh yeah.

P7: Yes.

P6: The Wyre Forest is very important. It's the biggest contiguous, we're told, oak forest in England. Or certainly one of them, which is amazing. It's been coppiced, which means it keeps changing. Which is a bit distressing, 'cause I like to see old oaks. I collect that. I'm surveying veteran trees, they're mostly oaks. We haven't got many in the forest. But they served a purpose. Industrial Revolution and charcoal dictated that for that time. And now of course charcoal is finished, it's gone wild. But it's really important, the Wyre Forest and does a lot form me and a lot for the communities around. And I belong to a small group called the Facilitation Group, which tries to combine all the activities that go on in the Forest, butterflies, birds and bees and timber, all sorts of things, and go particularly for government grants to keep them going. So there's a community there. I'm not sure Ruskin would… Well, Ruskin probably would've approved.

P5: I'm not sure when is a forest not contiguous. I know in terms of forest, the Wyre Forest is nowhere near the size of New Forest or all the forests up in Scotland for that matter. But most… I think the definition of forest, one has to be careful about that. It doesn't necessarily mean you've got lots of trees. It can be fairly bare of trees, in fact most of New Forest doesn't have trees, there's lots of trees but…

P6: I was told that you can't call it a "forest" unless it's been a king's hunting ground.

P5: Oh okay. Certainly the New Forest was a king's hunting ground, but whether that…

P6: And this was.

P5: I didn't realise you turned that around.

P6: I've got a rather snooty son who lives near a forest in Northamptonshire. He said "Well of course ours is a proper forest, none of these usurper ones." I said, "Well, actually, the king hunted in ours as well." "Oh." And it's three times as big as theirs. And it's a lot better!

I: I have a Ruskin quotation here: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P5: Very limited view. I think… you can divide things into needs and wants. People need not only those things, but also warmth, shelter, food – was that on it?

I: No.

P5: Right. Probably a few more things.

I: He believed these are the three things we need to produce everything else. Material things. Immaterial things like admiration, hope and love were separate things. Pure water, air and earth were the tree things you needed to…

P5: To grow things, yeah. Our needs as individuals begin at just that.

I: Any other thoughts?

P8: For me, it's a bit naïve.

I: Naïve? Why?

P8: We need many more things and life is better if you have many more things. Life is not about having only things, but they're important. Ability to travel, to live… There are a lot more things that are important than just being able to survive. You can survive on those three, but life is better if you do more than just surviving.

P5: True.

P6: I think he'd be more profound, if he'd got his hands dirty.

I: Yes… Well, he did in the garden, but he had a gardener as well, full time…

P6: We need a few philosophers, that we can pick at. There are actually two things I think…

P5: Nature.

P6: …in nature and life. One is reproduction and the other is food. They're the absolute fundamentals. If you look at birds and things, their life is that. We tend to do all sorts of other wonderful things. I go to the cinema, sing and do all sorts of things. Birds and animals don't do that.

P5: They sing.

P6: But they only sing because of food and reproduction. They don't sing just for the sake of singing.

P5: They're trying to attract members of the opposite sex…

P6: Yes. Or declaring 'This is my country, get off!' And once that's finished, they don't sing.

P5: I'm not sure where you'll fit that with Ruskin… [laughter] Sex and food!

I: Well, I think he meant that you need these things to produce food and everything else comes after that.

P6: My first biology teacher, the first thing I remember, and the last thing probably. He said, to make biology interesting to us, "Just remember this: all flesh is grass." All animal protein, like we're made of, comes eventually from photosynthesis and grass. Not sure how you'll use that but it is sobering at times.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you? If so, what?

P5: Well yes, it does mean something. It means attempting to create an environment where you may have a smallholding, and you have chickens, pigs, maybe a Jersey cow. And you produce your own food you might, I'm not sure about the grass, come wheat or barley side, but that tends to be rather bigger-scale... I don't know. But yes, it's a lifestyle. For most of us a choice of lifestyle, it's not forced upon us. We're creating… Satisfying our own needs for food, shelter, et cetera. And doing it in a way where waste products are going through compost toilets, reed beds, not polluting with toxic things the environment, and so on. I could go on, but I've ran out of steam.

P8: For me it's the idea about sustainability is an idea of organising the community, or the country or the world, in a way that promotes the growth and ability to live for many years to come. I don't like sustainability on a very small level, it's not practical. I like the idea but will not do it. I'm not going to have chickens. I'm not

doing this on an individual level, but I am supporting all ideas that promote it on the country, continental level. So we can work all together to share the responsibilities, to keep the world going. So for me that's an idea… I know that Ruskin was happy with small communities that were able to provide for themselves. I think we can make it a little bit bigger. So a country is a very good size, or a continent is a good size to try to organise to work together, not on the… few hundred people, groups level.

P7: It's how small villages started really, isn't it? You'd have a blacksmith, cabinet maker, forester and they'd grow all their own stuff, then started working between themselves, supplying the village. And the village gets bigger and bigger, into small towns.

I: Sustainability can mean different things to different people, to some it might mean recycling…

P5: Yes, that's sort of been foisted upon us over the last n years, hasn't it, recycling plastics, glass, cardboard… And most of us do it, we throw ourselves into it and separate all these little waste products out into the various boxes and…

P7: Years ago, when I was a youngster, we had a dustbin. One little dustbin, so big [showing size] and you never had all the plastic and the rubbish bins, did you? It's all come in, you now have three big wheelie bins outside the house, or two wheelie bins…

P5: Well, that's right, you need to be more sustainable, it needs to start at the production end, doesn't it. Or the retailer.

P6: When Ruskin was alive, I guess life wasn't as sustainable as it is now, when in Industrial Revolution, headlong plants, almost irrespective of money, wealth and manufacturer. I think, he'd have a shock now, to see… He'd probably say "Well, of course I'd told you all about this" and "Aren't they doing a good job, thanks to me." But huge change.

I: Ruskin was reacting to consumerism. When many new things became available and popular through advertising, and people had a little bit more money, they started buying things they didn't need, and Ruskin was reacting to that. I think he'd be horrified at our world now, this has not changed.

P6: He was a lone voice the, now he's not a lone voice. There's you and thousands other people like you.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land is important in any way to the local community?

P5: In so far as that it's attracted us here…

P7: I didn't know about Ruskin, I grew up in Bewdley, there was nothing in the Museum about Ruskin. I didn't know anything about it until I came here.

P5: How about The Guild of St. George?

P7: The Guild yes, I knew about the Guild…

P5: I'm not quite clear what the relationship is…

I: After having been here for up to two years, do you think Ruskin Land has the potential to be involved with the local community? Something to offer to people from around here, not necessarily just from Bewdley.

P7: Oh yeah.

P8: Definitely. There's a lot of very skilled people here, volunteers and employees. They have skills and are bringing the skills to people. At the moment, in Kidderminster, trying to find a course to learn something new is almost impossible. Everything is cut to the bone. There are no commercial organisations that train and provide entertainment at the same time. So I think this Guild, this Trust, has a lot to offer. To people like me, who want to learn something, who want to spend nice time, do something useful. So definitely.

P6: It's a lovely environment to be in.

P8: And yes. And on a sunny day, it's absolutely lovely place to be, it's gorgeous

P6: It's the best place I've ever worked.

P7: Very cold in the winter. [laughter] It's all to do with funds. If the funds are available, they can pass it on and we can do stuff that way, but it all depends on funds what are available.

P6: I've found that… went to this meeting last night, country people, but they know about Ruskin Land and respect it. So that's worked, if you like. They're not sure what happens here or wat the consequences are, but they like the feel of it.

I: Was it local people or landowners?

P6: Quite a lot were from around the Forest. But yes, within about 20 mile.

I: So they like it being here?

P6: Yes.

I: I wonder if the WCLT know that.

P6: That *Country File* one, I liked. Because here was a chap saying, 'Here's a neglected wood which we are now trying to discover about how to make it sustainable.' And that came over well I think. And then showed young… so people making things with the wood that came from it. Again, sustainability. I think that sort of is the image that people have of Ruskin Land and people working in the Forest. And that spreads.

P5: And they also work with schools I think, in Kidderminster.

P7: Yep, they have school projects come up here, in the summer. The charcoal, [inaudible], things like that.

I: Do you think it's important that school children get involved in here?

P7: Oh yeah, some of them don't know about the Forest. You know, they come to Bewdley and think, "What's a river?" In Birmingham, they're amazed, they see a river and they think "A day out on the river." In Birmingham! It is only 18 mile away. It's a shame. My lad is up in Sheffield right, and he brought 14 students down into the Wyre Forest and they were camping at Green Covet they'd never been out of the area. He said, "We're going camping, please bring something suitable to wear in a forest." High heel shoes, blouses… And they're sat be a fire, open fire, and the smoke is blowing in their eyes. They say, "Sir, the smoke's going in my eyes." And he said, "Well, do something about it." They never moved! Just sat there and the smoke carrying on blowing in their eyes.

P6: We also do some work for a school down here, and there are some kids who, as in any school, any community, who just don't like classrooms. And the farm they've got there, it's back to nature, back to animals, feeding animals, being outside the classroom… It's transformational for them. Brilliant.

P7: Birchen Coppice school in Kidderminster…

P6: It almost brings tears to your eyes watching. And we had some kids, they were the same kids, weren't they? And they *made* something. Out of wood, we made a bench.

P7: The Guild came down from Manchester, they made small seats, didn't they? They'd never been out in this environment. They were making a stool by the time they've left. They varnished it and left outside to dry.

P6: It's powerful. What happens here, is powerful. It's how you use it.

P5: I think woodworking has dropped off the National Curriculum, I suspect.

P7: I had it at school, my son never had it.

P5: Well, luckily, the school my kids go to, it's still on their curriculum. That's an independent school.

P8: Making stuff and caring about stuff is a brilliant thing to do, and it's not very popular at schools. They don't learn how to take care of trees, they don't learn how to build anything… It doesn't matter if you build out of clay or wood, we can do it from wood here…

P6: It's all about SWAT these days. I don't know what that acronym stands for… Science... [laughter]

P7: I've three daughters-in-law and they're all teachers and one's at Manchester, at Wells's, school there called Wells's? She's a headmistress there and the hours she puts in, it's unbelievable. But some of the kids wanna learn and some of them just don't want to know. So they get…

P5: Off-rolled.

P7: Yeah. And then my older son, he takes those children in, they've all got collars round their ankles and he points jobs for them to do. And they go on, they get employment. Otherwise, they'd just be pushed out the society.

P5: What do you mean 'collars round their ankles'?

P7: Yeah, these tags.

P5: Police tags? Right.

I: So they can learn practical skills?

P7: Yeah, he teaches them practical things. Everyday life, things they've got to do to survive, legally.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop? What would you like to see happen here?

P8: I would like it to be more open, to bring more people on the days like we have. We have two days of woodworking, so they can probably handle five.

I: So more volunteers.

P8: More volunteers. I would like it to open the workshop for people who want to do something. I… This is a thing that I think England really needs, open workshops. So, we have tools, we have materials, and there are people with ideas who don't have access to tools and materials and help. So if someone had an idea to do something, he could come to us, spend one day with us. Use our experience, or those guys' experience, not mine [laughter]…

P5: Modesty is our other problem.

P8: So I think it would be absolutely amazing if they could be even more open. They are very open, they are doing training, they're doing courses, they are bringing children and people for weekends, for a lot of activities. I think they could do even more. If they have time, resources of course…

I: So you'd like to see this happen in the future?

P8: Oh yes, and much more.

P6: It's the way this place works, isn't it really, the funding they get, the box's there to tick it: community, outside, use natural materials… I don't think they probably use "sustainability" but it's there, sitting there. And these are good values, we certainly appreciate them. And if we can spread that, wonderful.

P5: And if, talking about the national curriculum, if that could incorporate some of the traditional craft skills that generally are… you could do here, hedge-laying, maybe not dry-stone walling, but hedge-laying certainly, general conservation… That would be a good move.

P6: Since the architect students came here, bit weird and wonderful, bit arty compared to us practical guys, and some of the structures that they… where they're coming from? But for *them*, who'd been taught academically about architecture, here was wood. Oak we don't know about. We know it's heart of oak, it's fundamental stuff. But we can work it. And that was really important and I think: some more of that going on. As they do, they're making, they're designing some structures for here. And they're taking themselves out of the lecture room and into the forest. And living in a tent! All of that.

I: Oh so this is where they are staying! I was wondering… and in this weather! But I suppose it's all part of the experience.

P6: Yes.

P7: They were here in the summer, so they had the good weather. They were constructing things down the bottom there, in the shadows. Which is to some people… over their heads! But they seemed to know what they were doing, working all out how to do it, so…

P5: That sort of commanded our respect. We were very cynical. Remain pretty much that way, but every now and again "Yeah, okay. Yeah, like it." And that's what the chemistry can work here.

P6: Other architects in the past tried to get back to nature, hadn't they? Frank Lloyd Wright was a great exponent of it.

P5: You need a measure of… a pool of information and places to go, to get to sample it.

P7: Yeah and proper architects, well-established, have learned a lot of that in— Ruskin Land. Making frames in the shadows [laughter].

I: Spreads the word.

P6: And it draws interesting people here.

P7: All sorts, like you said.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P6: Well… we haven't mentioned pigs, have we?

I: Ah yes, I saw them yesterday, I went to feed them some apples. Are you in the pig share?

P5: Yes.

P6: I'm not. I looked at the maths and decided no.

I: Is it expensive then, to be in the pig share?

P5: No, no, no, it's not a lot. I have done volunteering in the past, in smallholdings. Looking after pigs, in the UK and also in New Zealand. And it was fun, it was great. So, yes, of course I wanted to get involved here. I wanted… After I retired, I wanted to get a smallholding towards Wales, moved down west… only this far. Instead of having a smallholding with pigs on it, I had twins instead. So that went by the way.

P6: And they're charming, they're not pigs.

P5: Yes [laughter], sometimes! [laughter]

I: So you like being involved with a smallholding?

P5: Yes, it's just another… route that this place is taking. Another arrow to their quiver.

P6: For me it's a privilege. To be here.

I: In the Forest or at Ruskin Land?

P6: Both. It happens to be Ruskin Land, that gives it another, sort of, historical link. Which… I don't really understand but I like it, sitting there. I like to feel that what he was trying to do is still going on but in a different way. But it's a privilege for me, as a retired chap, to come and work, with these guys, in the community. And do something practical in the wild. It's great.

P7: Is anybody in this day and age doing the same sort of thing like planting small trees, to make their own forest or are they just multinational?

I: I think there are other communities like that, but how is this run, I'm not sure about… I think the way that *this* is run, has a lot to do with the landowner. The Guild of St. George and the kind of organisation they are, and their attitude to the land. The Wyre Community Land Trust has a lot of freedom in what they can do here thanks to the Guild's support. Just trying things out. With the aim to make it a sustainable project, self-sustaining.

P6: This meeting that I went to last night, was organised by the Woodland Trust who have big ambitions to plant thousands of trees. And the meeting last night was "How many trees do you want on your farm?" Let's group together, buy them together, plant them together and work out the problems. So there are groups doing that.

I: Yes, I've seen that online, they're also offering trees to schools. Do you know what kind of trees?

P6: Broadleaf, not so much conifers. Broadleaf trees and hedges. That's their… and it's a sustainable mix. And with the grants you get for doing it, it's about 50/50%. So there's an incentive to do it. Plus, the expertise to do it. And, last night, three people came forward volunteering that they were teed up for it anyway. But they, that group was planting about 400, 500 trees this coming year. So there are groups out there doing it. And they're called the Wyre Forest Facilitation Group. So they're out there.

I: Thank you all very much.

P5: It's not Utopia yet, but we're getting there.

P6: Well, you never get to Utopia, do you?

Participant 9

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P9: About six years.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P9: I originally met John Iles at a conference in Cornwall, about 10 years ago and I'd realised that I'd worked with him a long time before that and came to see him, and then, through that, I became involved, I suppose. The simplest way of saying it [laughter].

I: How would you describe your role here?

P9: I manage the land Trust now. So, when John retired, I took over the management of the Land Trust.

I: But you said that you became involved 10 years ago, and when did John retire?

P9: John retired about three years ago. So, before I took on this job, I had a different job in the Wyre Forest, which was to write a strategic plan for the whole of the landscape, the ancient woodland landscape.

I: So it wasn't to do with the Land Trust?

P9: It crossed over with the Land Trust. But it was a different job, I worked for the Forestry Commission, and worked with a lot of Partners on… coming up with a 50-year vision for the whole of this landscape. And then, when that job finished, it was a three-year job, I came to Land Trust. Which was almost exactly three years ago.

I: If you write a vision for the entire landscape and there are private landowners, how does it include or exclude, or affect them? Do they have to work with the Forestry Commission?

P9: No, no. The whole of the Forest area is about 4.5 thousand hectares of ancient woodland, and about a third of it is public and two thirds is private. So, the Plan tied the public Forest into a specific plan, you know, it's a sort of a 10-year action plan. And the private owners were involved in the development of the plan, but it's not, it's more down to kinda nurture and persuasion to get them to do the work over a period of time, there's no power [short laugh]. I mean, the Forest is… Most of the

Forest is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and so it does limit what landowners can do on it. And through that, there's a kind of power to manipulate what they do and influence it. Does that make sense?

I: Yes. Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P9: I guess, I'd heard of Ruskin, but I really didn't know anything about it.

I: In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin? If at all.

P9: I kind of knew a little bit, I knew who Ruskin was, but I didn't really know much about Ruskin. So, I would say it's enhanced my understanding hugely.

I: Are you interested in Ruskin at all? Now, that you…?

P9: I am interested in Ruskin, yeah. I mean, it's amazing how much… once you start to know a little about Ruskin, how much it crosses over, obviously hugely with what we're doing here, but also in lots of other ways… it transfers to environmental and all sorts of other things.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P9: I mean, I came to see John because he was doing kind of parallel things… I was doing a different job, you know, about 10 years ago. And I came to see John and, as soon as you come in to this place, you realise how special it is? So, it's got, it's got an amazing kind of a setting quality, but it's also a very beautiful place. But it's a… I could also see the potential of what we could do here.

I: What about nature in general?

P9: Well, nature in general… Yes, I mean, I spent most of my career in environmental work… And this place… what we're doing here, working with nature is an absolute foundation of everything we do, so... It's absolutely vital. And, these sorts of landscapes, have become very… The wildlife is in steep decline, and so there's a pressing need to find a way of making these landscapes work so that they enhance wildlife and provide… In order to do that, it needs an economic and… a sort of community driver. Does it make sense?

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P9: Pure Air....?

I: Pure water and pure earth.

P9: Ah… Yeah, I think… I mean, it's obviously quite a complex question, because behind that… In its simplest form, that is true. But, in order to create the drivers, the structure to have those, you need a lot of different things. And that's… How you… So to provide these very pure things, you need quite a complex structure behind it. So he's right, but yeah… [laughter].

I: He had an idea, that all we need to live, was food and for food, you need these three. Alongside the immaterial things, like admiration, hope and love.

P9: Yeah. That's fine in its simplest form. But, getting purity, all those pure things in a place like this, is far more complex. But yeah, he's right, in principle.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P9: Yeah. It means that… A sustainable system is one that protects the environment, that… provides an economy that is in balance with that and… works within the environmental limits. And, the third element, is providing the community, or a meaning for the community and a purpose within that for people.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land?

P9: In many respects, it's finding a sustainable way of managing this landscape. So it's about those three things, but making it work in a real, physical environment. So, I think that's kind of Ruskin would have wanted, so it's using the products that we produce to drive… to find an economy that drives the landscape, protects the environment. And create a community around that, that gives it meaning and purpose.

I: Why do you think this area is special?

P9: Ruskin Land is special because it's very… I mean, it's got a history with Ruskin, but it's also an ancient woodland that's probably been here since the last Ice Age, so it's got an awful time depth. So, it's special because it's got that history and time depth, but it's also special because it's got, for me it's got a contemporary challenge of how you make that function. And it's lost, it's a landscape that's lost a lot of its purpose over the last 100 years. It had a very, very strong economic purpose until about 100 years ago. And then it fell off, and it's become a kind of dormant landscape. It's lost its purpose and it's become a kind of landscape that's gone to sleep. And what we're trying to do, is to bring it alive again, and give it new energy. It's not a natural landscape in any sense, it's completely man-manipulated, and has

been for hundreds of years. So what we're trying to do, is bring it alive and give it new energy again.

I: So perhaps Ruskin was a bit naïve, he thought, and this is a Ruskin quotation, that this area was "untouched by the hand of man."

P9: No, it's totally manipulated. In fact, when Ruskin, you know, would have come here, it was a very, very different landscape. So, we've got lots of tall, majestic trees. When he visited it, it was a coppiced landscape, it would've been quite heavily worked, there would've been a lot of people here. It would've had a lot of, particularly charcoal huts, so it would've been quite a smoky place. So yeah, the trees would've been much, much smaller. And it would've felt, I think it would've felt like it was quite an industrial place, in many respects. Very different.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P9: Yeah, it definitely has and it already does. So already… I mean, when you start adding up the number of people that are directly involved in Ruskin Land now, it's probably about 120-150, but if you look at the influence Ruskin has on the immediate and the wider community, it's beginning to get a lot of traction. So, we're beginning to do things here that are beginning to ripple out into… across the country really. So, yeah, it totally is.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P9: Well, we are planning… we've got aspirations to do quite a lot more here. So, over the last three or four years, Ruskin Land as an entity, has come back together. So, for many years, St. George's Farm was tenanted to one person, since the 1950s. The woodland was tenanted to someone else, for the last 40 years and Uncllys Farm still is tenanted to someone else. Although John obviously has very close affinity with what we're doing here, and there's a lot of coordination. So bringing that asset back together, as one management unit, has made an awful lot of difference to what we can do here. Particularly the relationship between the Guild of St. George and the Land Trust. We're very much aligned in our vision, and our, and what we want to do. So over the next…Over the last three years, we've got the site back together and we've began to transform a quite a derelict farm into something that's got much more purpose. And we've started off with quite simple things. So it's a place for the Land Trust to work from, but it's also becoming… we're

also building other work space here. And one of those things is particularly up in the wood yard, bringing in a way of processing the tree trunks into timber. And over the next two or three years we have aspirations to, down to getting… you know, we need to get money and investment in to do it, to build a much more sophisticated centre here. With much more high-grade workspace for making things and a proper centre here, that can support the Land Trust and it's volunteers, enable us to do more education and training, and ancillary things that we can't do at the moment. That is worth saying, you know, one thing that we want to do is… Ruskin had the idea of this place supporting a community, that I suppose… enacting his ideals. I suppose it's relatively true, isn't it. We've got the same aspiration, but doing that in a contemporary way. So we have got aspirations here to put in housing and other things, that could support a real, living community here that's related to the Forest.

I: But the housing would be for tenants like there are now at the Bungalow or St. George's Farm or...

P9: No, no. It would be much more… I mean, in talking to the planning authority, they will support housing here, but it has to be for workers, rural workers. So it has to be related to… There'd be ties on the housing, so they could only be used by the people working here. Couldn't be sold on the open market.

I: That's an interesting plan!

P9: Yeah! So it would be good, you know, because one of the problems, particularly because agriculture, forestry and cultivation… they are basically a low-wage economy, so it's very difficult, particularly for people starting out in these fields, to afford to live even in an area like this. So part of the idea of getting housing is to enable people to live and work here.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P9: I think one of the things… I mean, we've got a very strong partnership between the Guild and the Land Trust and we've been exploring… I mean, we're doing a lot of work on shared visions and aspirations for Ruskin Land. And we've explored, we've been, we've had circular discussions about whether we should be much more formally connected legally. So we are looking at that. But one of the things that's becoming clearer is, is what we're doing here, in national terms, is quite innovative.

Because of the sort of thing we're talking about. We are beginning to make the landscape pay and work. In actual fact, that is, there are not many places that, there are not many organisations around the country that are actually doing this, in the way that we are doing it. So, there is quite a lot of national interest in looking at this, the Land Trust model. Which is really around forming a co-operative that builds a structure between the landowners we work with–and we work with about 30 landowners–the community, the volunteers, the people who actually work here, and the crafts people that we involve, the contractors that we use and the people that come on courses. But forming a legal structure that binds all that together–which is quite an interesting thing. So it could, you know… I don't know if Ruskin would approve that… He probably would have done. And I don't know how that compares to what the original settlers had. I don't think they had any sort of company, or structure, or partnership that built them together. They were working independently, weren't they? So… we're trying to do that in a way, which is… I don't think it's been done in the UK. I don't think there's anyone else doing this, maybe one other place I know about. So it's quite an interesting experiment. [laughter] Landscape experiment!

Participant 10

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P10: I think it's about… three years. Yes, three years.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P10: Okay, well… I really like history and art, and one of the things I do, when I've got spare time, is, I surf the net, just read historical stuff. And one day I was reading, I think it was probably Wikipedia, and I was reading about Ruskin. And, there was a link on the Wikipedia site to the Guild of St. George, so, naturally, I started to read about that as well. And it just jogged my memory, because, as you know, I was brought up around here. And I used to play in Ruskin Land when I was a child. So, I lived just across the road there, and I'd go up Hop Pole Lane and I'd usually go along right at the top there, along Hop Pole Lane, right down to Dowles Brook. Seriously, all day, we'd just play. And sometimes you could go right down Hop Pole Lane and down, and then, by some miracle, you'd come out on the left up

Tanners Hill, and I used to think it magic, you know? So that's, that was when I was little. I'm talking about 11 maybe 12. And I remembered Ruskin Land. I wouldn't have any education about it at all at school, I didn't know why it was called Ruskin Land, I'd forgotten about Ruskin Land really. So, when I read that there was an area in Bewdley, that'd been donated by George Baker and given over to Ruskin, and there were people living there, I thought "Yes, I remember, there was houses, I remember houses in the middle of the forest!" And there was a thing on the website, there is a thing on the website, just saying, "If you're interested and you have a connection, you feel a connection with Ruskin, write to us and say what it is and you can be a Companion." And I just thought, "Fantastic, what an amazing thing, that's something John Ruskin set up that's still going and I could be a Companion." So that's what I did, I just wrote and said I was a child in Bewdley, I love the Wyre Forest, I've got really happy memories, I'm really interested in art and history, and I work as a child counsellor as well. And we use a lot of art for therapy, obviously. So anyway, yes, so that's how I became a Companion.

I: How do you see your role here? You said you're a Companion, and you're also a local of Bewdley, is there anything else?

P10: I think what we were just talking about, so now, everything's just changed for me recently. Now, I'm working for a local charity, and that charity is homelessness prevention for youngsters, for 16 to 25-year-olds. As a Companion, I can use my connection with the Guild to say, for example, to access the Forest and opportunities for youngsters that we work with. It's just doing good work really in the community, it's enhancing my opportunity to do some good work.

I: You said that you knew of Ruskin Land, but did you know anything about Ruskin at all, before you started your internet search?

P10: I would say I knew that John Ruskin was a Victorian rich man who was a thinker and a leading… philosopher really, that's what I would describe him as. I knew that he was into art, I knew that he was… yeah, I think I thought that he was an art critic really. I think I knew about his connection with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, that was it really.

I: Would you say that your involvement with the Guild or at Ruskin Land has enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P10: Yes. Because, I've heard about Ruskin and I've read a little bit about him now. He's difficult to read in the original form, but, yeah, I know a lot more about him now and so, for example, I can see the connection between his ideas and working class people's alienation from the land and from artisanship, craftsmanship. And I can see those ideas are relevant today, they are still relevant. And I know that the ideas that he wrote down, were read by the people who set up the Labour Party, so that's a thread. I'm a member of the Labour Party. So, that's something I didn't know about before, before the Guild. But being a member of the Guild, it's encouraged me to find out more about him really.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P10: I love nature and I find my own, sort of, mental well-being is *much* better if I manage to spend a bit of time every day outside. It's not always possible to be in nature, but yeah, I like to be outside. And I think nature itself is very therapeutic, whether it's walking amongst trees and fields and animals, or whether it's growing something… you know, gardening. I think it's very therapeutic.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P10: I think he's right, yeah. I mean, he said a lot more than that, didn't he? He also said "There's no wealth but life" and he said… he said something about work, didn't he? I can't remember his quote about work, about the value of it and what it means to people.

I: This quotation I'm giving here is actually half of a quotation. He said that there are six things that people really need, and three of them are immaterial, admiration, hope and love. And then there are pure air, water and earth and these are the material, basic things that people need to survive, because they need these for food production.

P10: Yes, it's to do with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, isn't it. So, the physical, material things, I would agree with him there. But there's more than that. So once you're safe, and you've got somewhere warm and dry to sleep and to live, and you've got food and water, then the next things you need are activity really, and structure. And then, right at the top is self-realisation, to go back to Maslow, isn't it. So, he's partially right.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P10: When I think about sustainability, I think about recycling and about, say, the amount of plastic there is in the sea and fishes with their bellies full of plastic and obviously the profile of that is much higher now, more recently. So yeah, that word, sustainability, means, to me it means, you know, not buying carrier bags, re-using as much as I can and buying my clothes from charity shops and that sort of thing. Rather than buying new all the time, 'cause we've got too much stuff in the world. And if you go into your average charity shop, you can see where it all goes, there's just too much stuff hanging around. We don't need any of it.

I: Do you think that Ruskin Land is special in any way? And if so, then why?

P10: I think the line right back to John Ruskin himself and that connection, that's really important. And the fact that it's remained unchanged. I mean, I know the fact that it hasn't been touched really for a long time is a bit of a problem, if you talk to the people who are now wanting to manage it as a woodland. But it's just… To me it seems a good thing that it's remained like that, all that time it's been in that ownership… it's kind of protected. It's a bit like the National Trust almost, it's there for us to enjoy.

I: You mentioned some youths that you work with, that could potentially benefit from being at Ruskin Land. Do you think this area has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?

P10: I don't know actually. I don't think I've been here long enough as an adult to know about that. I'm still finding out about what's involved and what there is in this community. So I think I might have to pass on that one.

I: What about the Wyre Forest, do you think that such an area of woodland is important in a community such as in Bewdley?

P10: Oh in the community, definitely. It's like the River Severn, it's a fantastic amenity to have on your doorstep.

I: From your brief re-association with Ruskin Land, do you have any views on how it should develop? We had an update on the area last Saturday and you've seen it too last June, has that given you any ideas as to what could happen there?

P10: Yes, I was in one of the discussion groups on Saturday, I expect you were as well, and said I'd like to see a practical change because I know that the Guild

manage properties and I'd like them to set rents at a fair rate, rather than market rate. If at all possible. Because they own the properties, so they have the value of the properties as an asset, and I think that would be a way of assisting local people with housing needs. So yeah, that's one of the suggestions that I've put forward. I don't think they do that at the moment, it's a bit of a mish-mash, because they acquired properties at different times and I don't think there's an overview of how they manage them. I think there should be.

I: It's interesting, because Ruskin said that rents should be "fixed," which probably means for a long time at the same level, and "fair" and he thought that all the money should go back into the properties–not necessarily the one that the rent was taken from, but…

P10: Yes, it should be used to... Well, I spent a lot of time working as a housing manager, before I trained as a counsellor. So I worked as a housing manager in Manchester, and in Newcastle, and local authorities, if they own a property, if those properties are sold, up until recently, the local authority couldn't use the money from the sale of the property to build any more properties! So it was kind of… it wasn't within their control. So I totally agree with Ruskin on that, I think any income that's derived from the ownership of these properties, should be ploughed back into, for everyone's benefit really.

I: I think there are some plans at Ruskin Land to build houses for the younger employees there. It seems like a good idea.

P10: Yes, it is a good idea, and it is *so* difficult in Bewdley… because youngsters, first-time buyers are being driven out really, I think. It's cheaper to buy and live in Kidderminster, but it's not as nice.

I: And you have to drive as well.

P10: Yeah, yeah. So then, we're back to sustainability, aren't we?

I: Exactly! I was thinking about that on the walk here, that everyone arrives by car, the employees and all the volunteers. And one person per car too. At the moment I suppose there isn't anything they can do about that, but it's… so many cars a day…

P10: I was thinking about that when I was doing the art day, a couple of weeks ago. And I was thinking… I was thinking if it was more accessible, that would mean more

cars! 'Cause people wouldn't walk it. So, I don't know what I think about that really, there's a balance to be had, between the sustainability and accessibility as well. And I don't know where you draw that line.

I: It's a shame they can't use the old railway line, they could use a small electric train [laughter]. But that would bring many tourists and that's also something…

P10: But that would bring an income as well, so… They've got to manage it. They've got that discussion going on in the Lake District at the moment, 'cause they've had so many visitors, it's being destroyed. And I think quite a few tourist areas as well. People want to come, but by coming, they actually destroy what they come to see. So… [laughter]

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P10: I don't think so... I think I've more or less covered everything really. All I can… In my memories of Bewdley, back then in the 70s, is that you could walk down into Bewdley in the evening and never see a car. There was just no cars coming through at all. It's only when I think back to memories like that, I realise how many cars there are now.

Participants 11 and 12

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P11: Probably about 5 years, 4 to 5 years.

P12: Yeah, on and off.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P11: I personally, have been haunted by Ruskin all of my life. Well, my adult life, rather strangely. My first studio was at Ruskin Mill in Nailsworth, at the beginning of their development. And I was at Sheffield at my university, and of course Ruskin was involved there. And then, moving here, my studio was once owned by the Guild of St. George, so he's even followed me here. And we have Ruskin Mill in Stourbridge, with the glass centre. So, I'm surrounded by Ruskin. So when I found out about Ruskin Land, I thought, "Hmm, I should find out more."

I: What about you?

P12: Well, whilst volunteering in Japan, I received a message from Hilary, saying that she'd joined this Guild of St. George, sort of salubrious title, that's quite interesting. And I guess, my access point as it were, to the Guild originally was through Ruskin Land, so through the natural world. So as Ruskin might have intended Companions who were interested in the Guild would do so. But yeah, we've sort of developed lots of interesting projects and activities located in an around Ruskin Land.

I: How would you describe your roles here?

P11: I'm not sure we have a role…

P12: Well, it's quite loose, isn't it, we're sort of…

P11: The good thing about the Guild is, they let you develop your own connections and perhaps projects and we've sort of done that between us with Japan. And building connections with the Guild and gaining new Companions, and working with existing Companions in Japan. Focusing on the celebrations next year, 200 years since Ruskin's birth. And it's a bit like dropping a pebble on a pond, the rings are going outwards… The Big Draw that we've just completed here was live with our friends in japan and the Big Draw there. They're members of the Royal Society of Arts, which I'm a Fellow of here, so the networking is going out from the Royal Society of Arts in Tokyo, but with a message of Ruskin alongside. So it's very strange how these things develop. And now there's discussions about bringing UNESCO students from Japan to Ruskin Land, and an exchange back to Itoen in Kyoto.

I: Would they live in those tents?

P11: Yes, and apparently that's fine! They don't… I don't think they mind, do they…

P12: Even in the winter…

P11: I haven't told them about the toilets.

I: Participant 11, you mentioned that you'd been exposed to Ruskin, Participant 12, had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P12: I hadn't actually! Maybe in passing, but not really in any great detail and depth, really.

I: Would you both say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P11: Oh yeah, definitely! Yeah, indeed.

P12: Oh definitely. In all ways possible.

P11: Academically, economically… yes.

P12: Socially.

P11: Yes, it's broadened our understanding. Very much so. And, and the connection are extraordinary between Ruskin Land and Ruskin, so you understand more about how the connections work.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P11: Big question…

P12: That's a broad question!

P11: I think… I think to respond to Ruskin, you have to have some natural response to nature also, to make those connections, to respond to his writing and to his way of seeing. If you have no connection to nature…

P12: …it's difficult to appreciate Ruskin unless you start to appreciate nature.

P11: They're parallel really. And you could say that about buildings also! If you didn't have some level of education to do with art history or history of architecture, then you would find it difficult [**P12:** Incredibly difficult.] to access his, his literature and writings and musings about that.

P11: Beauty in the detail…

P12: So always need an entry level really. [**P11:** Yeah] Otherwise he's just known as being eccentric and mad.

I: What about nature in general? This is a big part of Bewdley, you can't escape nature…

P12: Well, I think we've always, I mean, well, definitely me, used… more so recently, have been relatively exposed to the natural elements, in and around where we live. [**P11:** We've been walking more.] So, walking appreciating… But then, finding somewhere like Ruskin Land where there's just, you know, there's actually life and activity there, in the Forest again, which is nice to be a part of. But it's just a very beautiful place. I think we're able to appreciate it, but it's potentially, or possibly, more difficult for someone coming from the city or more urbanized area…

P11: ...I think they would appreciate his economic beliefs [**P12:** Yeah, probably much more.], and social beliefs more, actually living in a build-up area,

industrialized area. So there are different entry points for different parts of Ruskin, not just nature.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P11: Well… I think he's asking broader questions than water, air and earth. I think it symbolises the essences of life perhaps. So you need a balance in life [**P12:** Balance.], whatever you do, wherever you are. You need space [**P12:** Natural elements…], you need energy, and life is containing water [**P12:** …and soil, potential life.], water is life. And earth. You know, the Earth, we need the world around us. So I think perhaps it's a wider question about balance.

I: Well, he said that there are six things that people need to live. Three are immaterial, admiration, hope and love, and the material things are water, air and earth, because ultimately, all we need to survive is food and shelter, and if you have those three elements, you're okay.

P11: That's a very Victorian way of saying things, a practical way of saying things.

P12: Yes, very practical. I guess a modern example is Maslow… Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I think that's very important, especially in the modern day. People…

P11: That's psychology, psychological requirement as well. But if you believe that everything is interacting with everything [**P12:** With everything…] all of the time [**P12:** It's all…], the separation between those doesn't make any sense, particularly. You can be in a beautiful place, but feel very, very lonely.

P12: Yes, definitely.

P11: It's all about balance I think. And interaction. [**P12:** It's not all environment.] He does… I mean, Ruskin does occasionally go off of that, I mean he does, does see visions, sometimes, and writes about them, especially in Switzerland where he does go off into the more esoteric areas of, of things. And I like that! I am really happy when he does that, because we see him as a bit of a mystic. He is a bit of a mystic [**P12:** Shaman [laughter]], but he's being held back by his Victorian upbringing and Christian beliefs. But he does… I think he is a bit of a mystic, he is a bit of a sage, on the quiet… [**P12:** Bit of a guru]. Guru… yeah, bit of a guru. They said at the AGM he wasn't a guru and we went, "Yes, he was!" And he *is* a bit of a guru. And I think if he was allowed to wander off, like Jesus supposedly did for 30 days, and go and learn a

bit of Indian mysticism, [**P12:** Chilled out a bit.] it would have done him a *world* of good! [laughter]

I: Well, perhaps it would've been good for him to actually try and live without his cook for 30 days and see how he found living close to nature…

P11: Yeah! Just really pare everything down and…

P12: There's only so much you can surmise from theory!

P11: He's institutionalised. [**P12:** Yeah.] He *is* institutionalised, Ruskin. In many, many and various ways. But he's still a sage within that institutionalising, in the way of living. He does see over the parapet occasionally. That's my opinion anyway.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P12: Oh…

P11: …

P12: In context of...?

I: To *you*.

P11: To me, sustainability… Well, I don't like the things that stay the same, because they eventually become void. But sustainability with growth, that's another thing. So it means that something is impactful, but then, from that other things can happen. That's what good sustainability… But just making sure something continues over and on just for the sake of it… I think it's [inaudible].

P12: Pfff, sustainability of production… Sustainability of… life, on Planet Earth.

P11: Is it a "stable"? I think it's a "stable," it's sort of got the word "stable" in it, which is a bit dull. But necessary perhaps, in the event of a… If we're all fearful, then being stable is quite good.

P12: Steady.

P11: Yeah…

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P11: It could have.

I: What would it be?

P11: Educational. Well, the reason I was having a meeting with… [woman who left when DW arrived]. She's a Wyre Forest District Art Officer, and they're not providing any mental health activities currently, and I'd been trying to do this art therapy thing. And I think it could be incredibly therapeutic. What it needs, and

what they're planning for, is the buildings and the infrastructure and the road to make it happen. And I think it could be. So, it could be a focus for creativity… happenings, like Studio in the Woods, we were talking about arts in the woods. It could be a focus for many various research development… Housing, they're thinking about putting affordable housing on the site, aren't they…

I: For the employees, potentially.

P11: Yeah, yeah. So, I think it can. It hasn't, at the moment, had much impact at all. [**P12:** No.] But it could do and I think it will.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land to go in?

P11: It needs accessibility. To have any form of impact.

P12: Definitely, yes.

I: Accessibility in what way?

P11: Road. Physical road. Before that happens, nothing can... Well, things can happen…

P12: There's no point in informing people that it's there because they can't get there.

P11: They don't go there and they can't get there and they don't like getting there.

I: And they can only get there in cars.

P11: And *they* don't even like taking their cars there, because of the road. So… it's inaccessible for a lot of people as it currently stands. So regardless of what happens there, unless you're camping and you're stuck there. But that's changing, and that's part of the plan. Once that's in, people will come and think. But at the moment, people don't even know where it is and that it exists mainly. I got my students to come for the Big Draw and none of them had ever been there before.

I: Well, I wonder sometimes, how much local people know about it…

P11: Well they don't, they're my local people and they don't know anything about it. Where is it? How do I get there?

I: If you see it on the map, you might realise something is there and the new board has only been there since when? Was it there in June?

P11: I know… But when you think there weren't even any toilets there two years ago… There was no electricity there five years ago.

P12: It's sustainable growth [laughter] I guess.

P11: I always think of Ruskin Land a bit like someone's head of hair? And they've taken, they've said "Here you are, have a head of hair. But I want you something else than hair on it." They've taken a razor blade and cut an area of land, and they're trying to grow things on there other than hair. Because that'd been a forest for… millennia, really. And they've got this plot of land that they've cut out in the middle… They wonder why they can't grow things or it's not sustainable. That's how I see it. Do you see what I mean? So they can't grow their way to sustainability, they *can* do the oak and a…

P12: But the only… They've got to make it sustainable to attract local people, it has to be somewhere *more* than just a forest. [**P11:** Yes.] Because there's so many options… Maybe for people from Birmingham, local urbanized areas, it's quite impactful, but for local people… [**P11:** they've got the Wyre Forest Activity Centre, haven't they.] So many.. Wyre Forest local Nature Reserve... You've got, it has to be something *more*…

P11: Child-friendly... There aren't loos there, for God's' sake! There aren't the facilities there to support activities at all. [**P12:** It has to be something more than a forest.] John's talking about knocking the back wall out of the Studio, and putting…

P12: It needs to be a community space, rather than a forest. And they *are* trying, [**P11:** that's what they're planning to do] and it's only been the last couple of years [**P11:** So if you think what they've achieved in the last couple of years…] that the ball started to roll, so…

I: Maybe it'll come

P11: It will come. And I think the link with the architectural college is interesting, the buildings. I think they're doing… I think Ruskin Land will really work well. I really do. And I hope to be a part of it, I really do, because I think it's exciting. And I've seen how… You're aware of Ruskin Mill?

I: Yes.

P11: When I, Angus and I… I was… When we first started in Nailsworth in the 80s, so I've known, seen that grow for 30 years you know. I mean, he started off with this barn where I was, I was up in the roof, 30 years ago, with his brother. And now it's an international movement, Ruskin Mill, all places they have. So I can see what impact it has. It really does.

P12: A lot of potential.

P11: I think it'll be great, it'll be great for this area. 'Cause there's not an arts hub in this area, creative hub.

P12: No…

P11: It's very early days, it's really, really early days.

I: It will grow.

P11: It'll be good, yeah, I hope, I think it'll be very, very exciting there. Really nice. And open to lots of possible… Once you've got space, you can do lots of…

I: And they have it.

P12: Yeah, there's endless potential.

P11: It'll be great. And of course, they can get extra funding, and different types of funding, so they can feed in from different directions. I could think of a *thousand* places like that.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P11: I think what Ruskin has meant to me over the years is… wider understanding of… the impact of creativity in individuals and societies. There we are. And the importance of it. And also linking in with the eastern philosophies of the spirit of the craftsman being in what they make. And importance of each individual piece of craftsmanship links very strongly in with Ruskinian beliefs. So that's been a very interesting journey, finding the link in the eastern ways of working too. It's a journey, isn't it?

Participant 13

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P13: Two and a half years.

I: Why did you get involved?

P13: Long-term illness. Treat it as work, to see if I can do five hours work again. And that's why I got, that's why I came here.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P13: Blimey… What's my role here? [to another volunteer] The lady is asking what's my role here, shall I tell her the truth, or shall I make it up? [laughter] I honestly couldn't tell you, I don't know. I came to treat it as work, now I come 'cause there's a bunch of guys I like having a laugh and a joke with.

I: So that's your woodworking group?

P13: Yes.

I: And you come just once a week?

P13: Yes.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P13: Had I heard of John Ruskin do you mean?

I: Yes.

P13: I'd heard the name, yes.

I: But you didn't…?

P13: No, not at all. I'm not a cultured man really.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of who John Ruskin was and what his work was about?

P13: No.

I: So you're not looking to learn more about Ruskin?

P13: After two and a half years he's been mentioned that often… I know, 'cause I like Oxford, that he gave… Not inflammatory talks at Oxford, but some these things that were, you know, maybe controversial for the time, I don't know… So, because I came here in the name, I'm gonna have to find out now. I'm interested enough. And I will.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P13: Well, I've been coming to the woods since I was a boy. I grew up, I live close by, I grew up reasonably close. It's there, it's a good place to be… It's better than being in a city.

I: So it's important to you to be close to nature? Or is it just because of the circumstances of living locally?

P13: No, it's, I like that. Yeah.

I: You chose to come here to volunteer, I'm sure that there are other organisations that you could go to...?

P13: Well, it's a friend of mine who died recently, older man, he used to come up here. And I learned about it from him.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P13: Right. I've been off for ten years… I've worked on the building all my life and I understand there's room for this philosophising. It that's life, maybe I can deal with that much mumbo—jumbo. You see what I'm saying? I'm not trying to be flippant or anything like that, but obviously I have to think about other things and I… Yeah, pure air, yeah… I need a bit more than that.

I: I think to him it was, this is the basis of everything that we need. You can grow food when you have the three things, you can grow wood for housing…

P13: Yeah. I don't know what to say to some of these, but carry on, it makes me think and that's a good thing.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P13: Very much so, yeah, very much so. I mean, having been very ill… we eat organic when we can, you know, I've learned a great deal about nutrition… 'Cause I used to live very badly. And that was at least part of why I ended up very, very ill. So, you know… yeah. We do, you've got to think about these things.

I: So for you this is about your lifestyle?

P13: Yes. It is now, yeah.

I: Do you think that Ruskin Land is special in any way?

P13: No, not really.

I: Just part of the Forest?

P13: Yeah, it's just another part of… From what the Management tell me, it's not been managed in very many years and they're trying to get back to that, to managing it, but I wouldn't… I mean, my perspective is a little skewed, you know. Other guys are here, 'cause they're retired men, looking for something to do. I'm here for the good of my health. I haven't really got the luxury of being too… I haven't got the luxury of sitting around being, talking philosophy about it. Because of my circumstances. But I do understand that this is necessary and there's room for that.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P13: I would say so, yes. I would say so. I mean, it provides us lads with… It's like being on a building site again, in a way. You know, it provides that. People who are looking to get out of their houses, people who'd been ill, like me… Yes, I would say it certainly does. Definitely.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop? How do you see the future of this place, or what would you like to see happen here?

P13: For me, personally, I would like more… and this is just me, because of the way that I am. We've basically spent two and a half years codging and bodging things, which for me is a bit… I mean, I know they're perpetually short of money, but I think perhaps more skills, maybe taught or…

I: So you would like to see them teach the volunteers?

P13: Yeah, or just amongst ourselves. You can learn it, you don't need so-called experts. You know, I've, my qualification, which is from a quarter of a century ago, is as a shipwright, building wooden boats. But, I worked on a building all my life. And, you know, guys with, and women, with modicum of intelligence, you can learn these things yourself, or between you, or maybe with a bit of help from somebody, or whatever. I don't think a lot of money needs to be spent on them having… so-called experts.

I: So it could be put on by others in the group who know something?

P13: Yeah. That's right. Another guy always knows something, you either made him… or the internet. You can learn things, it can come from yourself. But I think perhaps we ought to do a bit more of that instead of just… ruining perfectly good piggeries. [laughter]

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P13: It's very cold here! Can't do anything about it…

Participant 14

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P14: Just over two years.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P14: Just a volunteer doing various jobs that we've been asked to do. Some construction work, and then just some general woodworking jobs.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P14: Well I'm retired, a retired teacher. So, I was looking for something to do, just for a bit of interest, to meet new people.

I: And that's worked out, you've been here for two years?

P14: Yes, and it's interesting work in an interesting environment.

I: Did you use to teach something related to woodworking?

P14: Physics and technology, so I used to do quite a bit of woodwork as part of my job, with students.

I: Had you heard of John Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P14: I'd heard of him, but I hadn't really realise what he was about.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P14: Yes, yes. But I've not really looked exactly into everything he did. I've read a bit of the stuff about him, but, It's just here you know… I always used to walk in the Forest, walk around, and I always wondered what this place was. But I never really understood what it was.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P14: Oh, very, very positive really. Yeah. I mean, the Wyre Forest is like a lung for the west Midlands, a lot of people come out here. And then I live locally, so we go into the Forest quite a lot. Just walking and cycling really.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P14: Yes. Now that we've set up this workshop here, it'd be nice to get more people involved and coming out and using some of the resources here. 'Cause I think that's what this was set up for, so that people from the local area could come out and use the equipment when it's set up. And I think… some of the more permanent volunteers are gonna use it for as a sort of an education centre for children from primary schools. Which I think they have done in the summer before.

I: What would you like to see happen here, how would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P14: More of a community resource really.

I: A community resource?

P14: Yeah, I think so. So that people know that it's here. 'Cause a lot of people go walking in the woodland here, walk past on these tracks, but they don't come in. It'd be nice, when they finish the building over there, that there were signs, you know, "Come on in and see what we do!"

I: Well they put up the board recently…

P14: Yes, but it's only in the last two years that we've really got this place set up.

I: I remember when I first arrived, there weren't that many partitions here and it was all open here…

P14: That's right, earth floor…

I: Oh yes, I forgot!

P14: But you can see there's lots of wood for sale and I don't think many people know about it, 'cause it's not advertised as well as it could be. But, if there was like a centre over there, that people could just pop in and see, "Oh I'd like to have a gate made" or something like that.

I: So there should be more information?

P14: Yes, I think so. But, I say, they've still got a long way to go before they've finished setting it up really.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P14: Yeah, I think so, I think it's true really, particularly nowadays. Things are becoming more and more polluted, even in ways you don't know. I mean, the climate change will start to affect people in quite big way in the next few decades. I think people need to sort of step back a bit and get back to doing things a bit more sustainably than they have done.

I: How do you understand the word "sustainability"?

P14: Well you can't use more resources than the planet can provide. At the moment, we're well exceeding what the planet can naturally provide with. So, we've got to cut back on our consumption. Just adjust the way we live really.

I: And from what I've seen in recent reports, we don't have that much time.

P14: No, but unfortunately I think that… until something terrible happens, people won't take any notice.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P14: Well, I mean, it's just the companionship of meeting sort of different people. Particularly for people of my age, sort of retired–as most of us are. You know, get the opportunity to do things with oak, which we use most of the time, which we wouldn't be able to do really, without our own, without our own workshops. So, this is great for me. And we have no commitments here, so… some places where you volunteer, like a charity shop, you have to say you're going to be there for so many hours or such a day. If you don't, you let people down. Whereas here we just come and go as we please. I might say, I'm gonna be here next week, but if something crops up, I don't have to. Although we do try and be here, most… And it gives us scope to be creative really, it's not just a simple industrial process.

I: You can make things you want to do, apart from whatever they want you to make?

P14: Yes, so we've been making these gates lately, but we… it's taken a while to get to know how to do them… So, we've all learnt new skills in doing this, just in cutting the wood and getting it to fit together properly. So it looks like a professional job, you know. 'Cause we're all amateurs, but hopefully they're the sort of thing people would buy.

Participant 15

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P15: Eighteen months.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P15: I wanted to do something different, I wanted to do something in this sort of setting and just started doing some woodwork at home myself, and had never done much at all before that, and I thought this would help develop my skills. But also, I'm retired and this is a nice way of, fits nicely into my week at home really.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P15: I'm just a general woodworking dogsbody [laughter].

I: A volunteer?

P15: Yes.

I: Had you heard of John Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P15: Vaguely.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of John Ruskin and his work in any way?

P15: Yes. I knew… I ask more questions of people and got to read a little more about it and so on, yes.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P15: I think, I think the adjectives are not always clear, as to what the overarching objective of the Trust is. I think that gets a bit cloudy from time to time. I think it varies. Sometimes you get the feeling that there is a mission, if you like, a clear objective. And other times you think we're muddling through a bit and we don't… we're kind of going from day to day, week to week. I don't get a sense, I'm sure there must be, but I don't get a sense of an overall, of an overarching plan.

I: What about the Wyre Forest and nature?

P15: I live near the Wyre Forest anyway, and I've been familiar with it for a very long time. I think it's… as an entity, it's very valuable. And I used to come here when I didn't live quite so close. I used to come to the Wyre Forest either to walk, or cycle, or whatever, and it's important that we have these sort of spaces really.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P15: Yes, it's important. It's important that whatever we do here doesn't affect the viability of the Forest as a whole. It's important that whatever we are taking out, whether it be oak or whatever, it is being replaced. And I think that's important. And I think… the impression I get is, whatever they do is part of that.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P15: Yeah, I think that's laudable, but it also has to… You also have to recognise that whatever you do has to be economically sustainable as well.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P15: Yes, it should do. It should be accessible. It should be… it should broaden the scope just beyond the volunteers, it should allow other people in to experience what it's got and so that other people can learn the same as we're learning.

I: Learn about nature or learn some skills?

P15: Both.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P15: No, don't think so…

Participant 16

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P16: Since March.

I: Why did you get involved?

P16: Because my uncle comes here as well. And I quite enjoy it.

I: Had you heard of John Ruskin before getting involved at Ruskin Land?

P16: No.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land and working with the other volunteers has enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P16: Not really, no.

I: You're not interested in Ruskin?

P16: Not really. [laughter]

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P16: Yeah, I think it's quite good, protects the woodland for the future.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P16: Yes.

I: How do you understand it?

P16: Well, obviously, use the forest as you need to, but also make sure that there's stuff left for the future generations.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P16: Yeah, I'd agree with that.

I: Do you think that Ruskin Land is special in any way?

P16: I think the whole of the Forest is special. I suppose it's different in the sense that it was never like a Royal hunting ground… hasn't had that sort of protection.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P16: To be fair, I'd never really heard of it, so probably not.

I: And you are a local?

P16: Yeah, about six-seven mile away.

I: So it's not that well-known in the community?

P16: It might be for the people of Bewdley, but not… I mean, 'cause I don't live that close to Bewdley. I'd never known...

I: So if it wasn't for your uncle, you wouldn't have really come here?

P16: Not Ruskin Land, no. Wyre Forest yes, obviously.

I: You've been here for a few months now, do you see any directions that you would like to see the place develop?

P16: I think it's gonna slowly grow… But you see, I don't really get involved in that stuff, we just come… bunch of volunteers, we just have a laugh, just do some stuff and… It's more of a social thing I suppose for us lads.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P16: No, I don't think so.

Participant 17

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P17: Coming up to two years.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P17: Retirement and wanted to work with wood and social side as well.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P17: Our role is, we are, we work with wood, we tend as a group to do more of the construction models.

I: Is it just the gates or…?

P17: No, we built that [pointing] so we tend to do a lot more of the building side, rather than just the gates. We've only been on gates for a number of weeks now.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P17: Yes I had. Mainly 'cause we went to his home on holiday and that's where we picked it up, Ruskin Land.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P17: Yeah, the Guild, obviously, has done educational courses and run seminars on it, we've been to a couple of those, they do training courses with dry oak, whether it's hedge-laying or wildlife, et cetera, which is ran along Ruskin's lines.

I: **Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What would you say to that?**

P17: Nowadays it's gonna be difficult, but I would agree.

I: It's difficult because…?

P17: Because of our lives, 'cause the air is so… you know, we're a consumer society and we… tend to… convenience.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P17: Yes, I mean, it's obviously… it's having a principle of where you don't just take, you manage things, land, resources to… not use them all at once

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?

P17: Well, I'm not sure it's special as in Ruskin [inaudible], it's a beautiful part of the country and it's obviously to me, we're locals so, rather than travel it's lovely to actually be part of a local project.

I: What does Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general mean to you? Are they important?

P17: Well, yeah, I mean, I did a science degree, reading biology, I've always loved nature and that side of it. So… not particularly today, but in the summer it's a lovely place to be up here.

I: So you just enjoy being in nature?

P17: Yeah, yes.

I: Have you lived here, locally, all your life?

P17: Near enough, went away to do a degree, but yeah.

I: So you've always known of the Wyre Forest?

P17: Yes, I've obviously always known the Wyre Forest and obviously always walked and spent time here.

I: Has this area changed much or had you never walked past Ruskin Land?

P17: The area's changed quite a lot…

[end of recording, equipment failure]

From notes:

The Participant approved of coppicing and the way Ruskin Land was being managed.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P17: Yes, it's important for people to get involved.

Participants 18 and 19

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P18: Fifteen years

I: What was your reason for getting involved?

P18: Because we live in a house with Ruskin connections.

I: How would you describe your roles here?

P19: Residents and… enthusiasts within the Forest.

P18: And keen to keep Ruskin's name… up to date and involved in Bewdley.

I: You mentioned Ruskin, had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P18: Oh yes, I think I had, yes. [**P19:** Yes.] The Arts and Crafts movement and… yes, definitely.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land has enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P18: Yes.

P19: Yes.

I: Is that a good thing?

P18: Yes.

I: There are no right or wrong answers here, you can say that you hate Ruskin and it'd be absolutely fine [laughter]

P18: [laughter] I don't think I'd like to have him for dinner. [laughter] I think… He'd be quite a challenging guest.

I: He'd probably try to dominate the conversation.

P18 & P19: Yes!

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P18: Oh I think you'd need a bit of compassion, or love, or… something.

I: Ah but these are material things, the immaterial things were admiration, hope and love. So the material things of life…

P18: Material things… Oh… Say them again?

I: Pure air, pure water, pure earth.

P19: I think that's a bit simplistic. I think so. Because you've got to have means to live, so it means you have to have an income, and that has to be derived either from inherited wealth–which is very unlikely this days–or the fruits of your labour.

P18: And you need the strength and the knowledge to till the land and grow the trees and know what's a weed and what isn't.

I: Does Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general mean anything to you?

P18: Yes.

I: What do they mean? How do you feel about them?

P18: Well they're so important, because it's… they're so beautiful. So many artists take inspiration from, from the land.

I: Do you think that this is something that Ruskin Land is important for as well, this area? If you look at St. George's Farm, it's different from the rest of the Forest because it's used, worked on.

P18: Yes…

I: Do you think it's important what they do there?

P19: It's important that they do what?

I: Well, the whole project.

P19: The project? Yes, I think it is important, because it's putting to good use the benefits of nature.

I: And do you think it has a role to play in the local area/community?

P18: With the volunteers, yes.

P19: Yes. It provides, it provides a very useful source of engagement to the volunteers. But it also provides a source of recreational facility for the wider public.

P18: But it also provides the wood for people's fires and the bird boxes, and the bird feeders and all the other things that are sold.

P19: Fruitful.

P18: Yes, yes.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you? If so, what?

P18 & P19: Yes.

I: What does it mean to you?

P18: It means that you don't just grow something and wait for it to die and it falls over, but you sustain it by taking a cutting and growing another tree in its place. And you sustain the Forest, and you keep improving.

P19: Yes, we're here to maintain the Forest for future generations.

P18: Absolutely.

I: And Ruskin Land has a role to play in that?

P19: Yes.

I: Do you think that Ruskin Land… Obviously Ruskin Land is part of the Wyre Forest, do you think what's being done at Ruskin Land can influence in any way what is being done with the rest of the Forest?

P19: It shows other landowners the… an appropriate way of managing a forest and it might inspire other landowners to do the same. So, yes, it definitely has a role.

P18: And there has been in the past some criticism of when the forest is managed and big vehicles and tractors and trailers come into the forest and make muddy marks, and people who walk dogs think "What are they doing in the Forest, they're spoiling our Forest." Well, all that's rubbish, because the Forest has to be managed in order to sustain it for future generations.

I: In what directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P19: I think it's important to… to replace the trees that are being removed with a wider and more diverse species. Because if, if we had… in the future, some form of disease that attacks our local oak, there would be vast areas of the Forest with nothing left. So it's important to restock. Which is what they're doing, with a greater diversity of trees, tree species.

P18: Agree with that.

I: So Ruskin Land management should remember that there are some environmental goals?

P18: Yes.

I: Have you always felt that the Wyre Forest is important or has your interest grown since you became involved, moved into the local area?

P18: I don't think I'd known about the Wyre Forest before we came here. [**P19:** No.] I don't think I'd heard of the Wyre…

P19: No.

I: So it was through moving here that you became interested…

P19: Yes.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P18: I can't think of anything else…

I: Does being Companions of the Guild of St. George… does it influence the way you feel about this area?

P18: I think wherever we live… We've always taken an interest in the, in the locality and become involved in various schemes to help sustain or, or improve…

I: You've taken your interests with you…

P18: It's a very general wish, not to see natural forests despoiled or… yeah.

P19: Yes, I think as Companions, we have an additional responsibility [**P18:** Yes.] to… and not only just to Ruskin Land, but to wider area, but Ruskin Land in particular.

I: As Companions of the Guild, what would you like to see done or happen to Ruskin Land?

P19: I'd like to see it continue to be managed in a sustainable way. Which is something that has not happened in recent… until recent years. Certainly much of the Forest hasn't been managed, and it's important that, I think, it's brought back under management.

P18: I think I'd like to see more opportunities for craftspeople to work. A bit like the blacksmith up at St. George's Farm. I mean I think–I'm a potter–I think it would be lovely to have a potter up there. There are hundreds of people who would like to come and learn how to pot and be interested. And so I think artists, potters… literary people who can hold poetry sessions, reading sess[ions]… literature appreciation… all sorts of things. I'd like to see the buildings up at St. George's

converted to a good enough standard to let some people to come and share the beauty of the Forest, and to see what's going on.

I: Something similar to The Studio in the Woods, except with different types of people, artists or creators?

P18: I think… Yes. I'm thinking something more permanent. Yeah. Because Ruskin was… was interested in many forms of art, wasn't he, art and craft. Yeah, I think it'd be very nice to have a potter up there. Not me! Not me, but somebody. Yeah. And then you would bring even more people in… You'd find even more people coming and learning about the Wyre Forest and Ruskin Land and the Guild.

I: Through getting involved....?

P18: Yes.

I: So, more people would be better as long as they are informed about the activity…

P18: Yes, I think it could even be quite sustaining, if you had a potter, say, you could… full, you know, always there, you could have people paying quite a lot of money to come for a day every week and be a… you know, you soon have an income enough to pay the potter.

I: A regular workshop or a class?

P18: Oh yes, yes.

I: Anything to add? What about woodworking, because that's…

P19: Well, we've already got woodworking, but I'd like to see the woodworking side of it increased, expanded, and I'd like to see the fruits of our labours be available to the wider community. Which is what we're trying to do over Christmas.

Participant 20

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P20: Since 1969.

I: Why did you get involved?

P20: Because my uncle, who'd been a member, Companion of the Guild since the 20s, he died. He used to live here, he used to live at Uncllys, and he looked after

the… all of Ruskin Land. Unitl 1969. So, there was no one else, so I just took over. 'Cause I'm here and a Companion.

I: Were you interested in Ruskin Land, or was it sort of, just an inheritance?

P20: It started as an inheritance, of course. And… But also, you know, stories coming down through my father about my grandfather and so on, and my uncle, and other members of my family who were Companions. So… And I was interested in the Forest anyway.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P20: What, now or then?

I: Then and now.

P20: It's much more passive now, 'cause I'm not a Director of Secretary. But, I was deeply involved, there was nobody else to look after the properties, they needed a new water supply, organised all that. If repairs were wanted, they came to me and I organised whatever was needed. And then, when I became a Director, I just carried on looking after the property. And when I was Secretary, I just carried on looking after the properties. Until I retired from that, and then John Iles took over, when I stepped down.

I: So this was very practical day to day management of....?

P20: Yes.

I: But the Guild, from what I understand, wasn't… that actively involved in that period, perhaps until the early 2000s it was mostly… the tenants were allowed to…. Live at the properties and [P20: Oh yes**.]… only ad hoc help, this was something you provided on behalf of the Guild, is that right?**

P20: Yes. They weren't Companions, they weren't interested in Ruskin, they were just glad to live here and work the land. And we had a few restrictions, that they shouldn't alter the feel of the place in any major way. So they kept the land and the buildings intact really, more less, until John Iles came along. And then, then it all changed, as you know.

I: This next question… Because of your family history, is not that relevant really: had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P20: Oh yes, all my life. Yes.

I: From a very early age, because your parents were…?

P20: My mother wasn't involved. My father wasn't either, but he had sympathy. My uncle was, my aunt was—who lived here as well. And it was just part of the conversation.

I: As a young man, would you say you were interested in Ruskin, or did it come with… your practical, more direct involvement with the Guild?

P20: Yes. And also it comes, I was saying before, usually it comes when you're a bit older, you have a bit of a perspective on life and then you start to sort of look back a bit and consider what's gone before you. All you do in your twenties… Unless you're studying it, you wouldn't normally consider it deeply, I don't think.

I: No, probably not… How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P20: As it is at the moment?

I: It's up to you to interpret this question [laughter]. Can be at the moment or as it was…

P20: Yes…

I: You've lived here all your life, haven't you? [P20: Around here, yes.] **This is sort of part of the local area, the Wyre Forest…**

P20: Yes. My father's concern for the Forest, 'cause he bought quite a big area to stop it being felled, back in 1951, so his concern really coincided with all the things that Ruskin taught about the environment, about safeguarding the naturalness and so on. So that wasn't in direct response to Ruskin, that was just how my father saw things. And I did too. And then you find that Ruskin was actually saying a lot of this 100 years before. So it happily coincides very largely… that's how it came about really.

.....

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P22: Well, it's like the… what's the word? Americans use it for the self-evident human right. The fact that people don't get it of course, it's… I'd just call that self-evident. Necessity.

.....

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you? If so, what?

P20: Sorry, say that one again?

I: Sustainability, does it mean anything to you?

P20: Yes, of course, yes.

I: What does it mean to you?

P20: Well… keeping the essence, in this case, a beautiful forest, with all the attendant, life in it, abundance of life. To keep that going on, without spoiling or reducing the spread of the wildlife. And to sustain it. I believe it should be considered as good at the moment, not perfect. And therefore, you want to keep it good.

I: Why do you think Ruskin Land is special? Or is it?

P20: Well, yes, because it hasn't been… It has been sustained, up to now, not with any particular thought to sustainability, it has been sustained and kept pretty much in its original state. You know the definition of the woodland here? Semi-natural ancient woodland, so not been planted up. And it has been worked for 300-400 years in the same way.

I: What do you think is the future of Ruskin Land, or what would you like to see happen at Ruskin Land?

P20: Well, nothing other than what I've already said, that sustainability implies carrying on what is good. So, that's a future I would hope to see. It's been allowed to be unmanaged for, since the 1930s I suppose, 1940s. So the balance of the open areas, you know all about this? Balance the open areas and standard trees and the new coppice growth has become a bit unbalanced. So the idea is try and get it back to working forest that it was.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P20: Yes, oh yes, of course it has. And it's made its own role in the last 10 years.

I: So it's creating a role for itself?

P20: Yes… And there are new initiatives and… John Iles is very good at this sort of thing, has ideas and you know, it's largely down to his inspiration. It's creating this role he's helped to form.

I: What about the local community? At the moment we have volunteers involved and these are mostly local people. They have all sorts of activities trying to make the community here aware of Ruskin Land. And also interested in Ruskin Land,

and in the Forest. Do you think that Ruskin Land has a role to play in the community?

P20: Oh yes, volunteers is an obvious one. And also Bewdley Museum. There are a lot of links with Bewdley Museum, as I'm sure you know, as well as Sheffield Museum, and there's an exhibition coming up in… next year, you know about that?

I: The March exhibition?

P20: So that's also linking up with Ruskin Land.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P20: I can't think of anything else at the moment, when you've gone, I probably will. No, I've got no burning message to leave with.

Participant 21

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P21: I started as a volunteer in 2015, January 2015, and I heard about the place through an advert, an application for a traineeship here. So, I applied for the traineeship, which would've started in March, but to get more experience, I started volunteering in the January and then was lucky and successful in getting the traineeship. So, it all started in 2015.

I: Why did you get involved?

P21: Because I've always wanted to work in the field of conservation, and to look after the wildlife here, in the UK. I'd done a lot of stuff abroad in the previous couple of years and… yeah, this here was a really good opportunity to work with a small organisation that had good views on conservation and looking after the Forest.

I: How would you describe your role here at the moment?

P21: So at the moment, my role is Volunteer Coordinator, so I look after all the volunteers, day-to-day emailing and liaising with them on what tasks we're doing each week, taking them out on work parties. Also recruiting new volunteers, organising events, especially for the Ruskin in Wyre project which we're currently running. And going to open days to… kind of spread the word about us, recruit new people to join our group.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P21: No, I hadn't.

I: Would you say your involvement at Ruskin Land has enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P21: Yes, definitely! So, I'd not heard of him before, but since working here, I feel like I've learnt a little about him. Well, probably a bit more than a little, but yes.

I: Did you know of Ruskin Land at all?

P21: No, I heard nothing at all. I used to work in the, at the Safari Park, so always were kind of in this area, but… I'd been walking around the Wyre Forest, but I had no idea about Ruskin Land or anything at all. So, all new.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P21: I love nature, I've always grown up around nature and been brought up to respect it, look after it. So, love working outdoors and here is just such a beautiful and nice place to work. The Wyre Forest has so many different habitats and supports such a wide range of wildlife it's really… every day is different and… Yeah, really good place to be involved with I think.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What would you say to this?

P21: Yeah, I think he's right. I think a lot of people nowadays consider other things to be more important, like technology and phones, and I think people spend way too much time doing things like using things like that, and I think people forget that you can easily live just with those three things and happily, live a happy life, you don't need all the other stuff to live.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P21: Yes. So, I feel like our work here is sustainable and we manage the Forest sustainably and… yeah, work sustainably here looking after the Forest and the conservation work that we do.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?

P21: I think… well, the Wyre Forest itself is special, but I don't think there's really anywhere like Ruskin Land, anywhere else. Especially the Wyre Community Land Trust, I think we're quite a unique organisation and the fact that we're working in

Ruskin Land makes us even more unique, there's a whole story behind the area and the story doesn't just start with the Wyre Community Land Trust, it start's way, way before that, with Ruskin and Ruskin Land and, you know, how this land was given to the Guild and… Yeah, I think it has a really nice story behind it.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P21: Yeah, I think it has. I think there's probably more of a role it could play and I think there's still quite a lot of people that don't know about us here. But I think especially the Ruskin in Wyre project has helped spread the word about Ruskin Land and what we do here, and it's definitely helped reconnect people back to the land, and back to working with tools and making things from objects that've been harvested through the management of the Forest. Yeah, I think it does, but there's potential for it to connect more with the local community.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P21: I'd like to, obviously like to see the Land Trust grow and for us to continue to stay here at Ruskin Land. I'd also, like… It's kind of, it's like a nice family here, so to see the group expand and to spread the word a bit more about Ruskin Land. I think it'd be nice to invite more people here. Not to have it as a, like a, public place to walk around, but hold more events to kind of… spread the word a bit more.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed? Any final thoughts?

P21: No, just that I think, as I said before, it's a really unique place and a nice place to work. I've met many really wonderful people working here and learned a lot about Ruskin and things I didn't know before, so… From not knowing anything about it to knowing a little bit more and what he, what he believed in…

I: Do you think it's important to know something about Ruskin to be able to work here?

P21: I think so, yeah. Because obviously we're trying to live and work by his philosophies, so I think everyone should know a little bit about him to… so we carry on doing that really. The arts and crafts and that kind of side of things, I'd like to see that grow a bit more actually.

I: You think the arts and crafts side of Ruskin has potential to grow in here?

P21: Yeah, definitely. So, with the Ruskin in Wyre project and having Alice as part of the project to run courses, crafts courses, I think that's been really popular and that's really helped us find out what works and what could be done in the future to get more people to come here to do more woodcraft courses and also… yeah, artwork. I think I'd like to see more people come up here just to sit and draw and connect that way. I think the idea of arts and crafts… it's already grown, but I think it could grow a lot more. And I'd like to see that happen.

Participant 22

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P22: I have been working here for six years I think. Had to think about that. [laughter]

I: Why did you get involved?

P22: Why, well, I was working at Wyre Forest District Council in Kidderminster and a job came up here, and the guy Fran Flanagan, who is the SSSI advisor, suggested that I might be interested in it. He thought it might be a good fit for me. So, he… gave the job details to my boss to give to me and they said, "We think you're gonna get bored in this job you're in, but we think this one might suit you" and they suggested that I apply for it.

I: That's unusual, isn't it?

P22: I know! So I tried not to be offended, like, are you trying to get rid of me? [laughter] But yeah… So, that was nice.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P22: My job title is Farm Manager, but I guess what I do mainly, is look after the herd of cattle we've got, but also the open areas of habitat, so the orchards and the meadows. So liaise with the landowners, sort out the agreements with the RPA [Rural Payments Agency]… I also work with Natural England and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, and Forestry Commission quite closely and act as their Grazier, so I work on different projects with them to get other bits of land into management and I do the grazing for them. So I sort of act as a Contractor for them as well.

I: This means that you get the WCLT cows to graze on other people's land?

P22: Yep. Exactly, that's right. So our little cows go out and hopefully behave and spread the good message of, of what we do. Which's been nice, because there's some new areas we've done in the last few years and people have come on courses or bought meat, and they've become like, more integrated with what we do as an organisation, because they see the cows.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P22: No, I had not. [laughter]

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P22: Ah, well, yeah, before, I didn't really know anything about him at all. So definitely being here, you can't help but learn little bits about him and about the sort of person he was and people that he's inspired. So, yeah, it's definitely… it's definitely changed.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things necessary for people's survival: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What would you say to that?

P22: I'd say… yeah, probably a bit of love as well, 'cause you know... [laughter]

I: Well, he said material things, immaterial were admiration, hope and love.

P22: Oh, material. Yeah, because, yeah, with air, water and earth you can grow things as well, can't you, so…

I: So you'd agree?

P22: Yeah.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P22: Well, I guess… As I decided to retrain to work in conservation and in nature when I was 29, so for me, it was like a very conscious decision, I wanted to work in conserving the natural habitat. The Wyre, I think it's really unrecognised, sort of around the UK not many people have heard about it, not many people have come here, but it is a really special place and I think, whenever I have my friends come to visit and they come here, they're like, really… You know, you get to see it through fresh eyes all the time, so it's really people say 'Oh wow, this is really amazing! Why have I never heard of this place?' type thing. And I remember when I was coming for my job interview at Uncllys Farm, and I was driving past the orchard, up the drive to the Ruskin Studio, and I thought "Oh wow, this place is so beautiful, I just

really want to work here, it just feels really nice." So, there's definitely… there's a special feeling that you get from being here in Ruskin Land which is hard to explain, you have to sort of come and experience it.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P22: Yes...? [laughter]

I: What does it mean to you?

P22: It means sort of, *I* would say, trying not to exhaust natural resources, trying to work in balance with nature, so use what you can without having a negative effect on the ecosystems going forward. So, in that terms in nature but then also from our business point of view, we need to be sustainable and need to make sure you know, we cover our bases and cover our costs, so that we can continue as a business, here.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special? Apart from being beautiful.

P22: I think… what makes it special, there's a good history here, there's a nice story, you know, if you read the book that Cedric Quayle helped write about the original families that came here, it really, it makes you think back in time about how it was. I think, I worked for the National Trust previously and it is sometimes the stories about the land and the stories they can tell you which make the land more special, so… and also, if you walk around, you can see different features like the sawmill pits, or charcoal pits or stuff, which, if you use your imagination, you can travel back in time through looking at things. Or you can see a tree that was previously laid as part of a hedge and now is growing upright and you can sort of imagine what things would have been like all this time ago, so… I do think it's like the history that makes it special. Obviously, there's a great deal of rare flora and fauna here as well, which, to people like me, are incredibly special, but it's a, it's a nice combination, I think.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P22: Yeah, definitely. I think it's been really great to see work that Kate Quinton has been able to do by bringing local school groups up here and children that wouldn't necessarily have been brought by their parents, up to sort of enjoy it. And also a lot of people previously would have gone to the Forestry Commission side, which acts as a bit of a honey pot, so actually getting people here, getting them to work with

their hands, getting them to learn the stories of the past, it's, it brings a different role than just being a plain Visitors' Centre with a café and a child play area and a car park and somewhere to walk the dog. Definitely. It's, it's got a different fit in with the local community.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P22: Hmm… Well, I mean obviously we need to sustain all the natural beauty we've got, but it's been lovely seeing it come to life and us being able to work with the timber that's here, being able to turn it into useful things, so, instead of people saying "Oh no, chopping down trees is bad," they can sort of say like, "Oh, I got my timber for building XYZ from there, and it's done sustainably." I think the engagement with the local community is really key, because by engaging with people you get them to want to take care of things. So, I mean… I have no great plans for Ruskin Land, but to continue and sort of grow organically I think would be nice.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P22: No...? [laughter]

Participant 23

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P23: As long as John Iles has been doing it, eleven or twelve years?

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P23: John came to me because I own land in the area and wanted to put my land into High Level Stewardship. Which at that time I couldn't be bothered to do, I couldn't be bothered with the paperwork and it's a really good thing that I didn't, because it's meant that that has been able to be winter grazing for the cattle for the Land Trust project. And I can see the cows from my bedroom window in the winter! So also, I mean there's another side to that obviously, is that our land wasn't properly managed, it's in much better management now, because the cows have been grazing it for the last eight-nine years probably.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P23: Oh that's interesting, isn't it? Director at the Land Trust, and have been involved since its beginning. I've been running the Ruskin in Wyre project with Tim to… yes, to project manage it, because that's the way it's worked out. I do a lot of work with Kate Quinton on events and education, help her run the programme on that. And obviously, as a Director of the Guild, have a land management role here as well.

I: How did you get involved with the WCLT? At first you were just a resident of Bewdley with a field and then from that you…?

P23: Yes, but John said "Come and be part of my gang and come and be a Director."

I: So John suggested it.

P23: Yes, John said this, from the *second* meeting, I was at the second meeting of the Land Trust, I wasn't at the first one, I was at the second one. And at that time I was the only woman for a long time.

I: So that was when the organisation was sort of starting?

P23: Yes. And it was a… legacy project from the big Grow with Wyre project which John and Linda had both been part of. There was a former [inaudible] project in the Wyre project to rebuild the Discovery Centre and so on, and there was some residual funding and equipment left from that. The Land Trust was set up as a legacy project of that and it took a small amount of money and I think some of the equipment, like the apple juice equipment came to the Land Trust. Otherwise, at the end of, there's always… Sometimes, at the end of a big, it was an over 4 million pound project, there's just loose ends, that need tying up. And it also, things like the orchard projects, a lot of the apple trees had been planted through the Grow with Wyre project, same with some of the Hedgerow Connectivity. And keeping those maintained was one of the Land Trust's aims, so that all the work that had gone before, over the last kind of 5-10 years wasn't gone to waste, is was still continued.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P23: No. [laughter]

I: In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P23: Well, because I've now become a Director of the Guild, and been to lots of [laughter], lots of talks and seminars on Ruskin, hugely I think is the answer. But, whether that's all directly through Ruskin Land or whether that's actually been, subsequently through the Ruskin in Wyre project I've been trying to educate more people about Ruskin, but I'm no Ruskin scholar. [laughter]

I: So, you became Director of the Guild sort of trough your involvement with the Wyre Community Land Trust…?

P23: Absolutely, it was… Yes, rather scarily, when Cedric Quayle retired as a Director of the Guild, John was… I was asked to fill his shoes, which actually was a bit bizarre, 'cause obviously Cedric had been involved with the Guild for ever, and had been Secretary for however many years, and his father knew Ruskin, or grandfather was it? His grandfather knew Ruskin, so you're like, "Actually, that's a pretty tall order, but okay." [laughter] So, yes, John had been, John and Cedric had been running the operation, the project here.

I: I think it's necessary to have locals involved rather than just, drop somebody, you know…

P23: Yes, well it had to be because of the way the whole project works. And then, obviously, the project's changed enormously in the twelve years that I've been involved anyway.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P23: Oh, that's a good open question, isn't it? [laughter] I think Ruskin Land is a very precious place. I mean, the very fact that it's marked on an Ordnance Survey map is just amazing, 'cause it, the kind of time depth of heritage, having somewhere that's actually physically called Ruskin Land is really interesting. What was the rest of the question?

I: How do you feel about the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P23: Well again, I've done a lot of work, I've been a member of the board of the Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership as well, so I've got to know to know a lot of the other partners and know quite a lot, learned an awful lot about how much work's gone on here. I mean, people like Butterfly Conservation with Jennie Joy, have done *such* a lot of work here to increase butterfly project populations. And obviously Rosemary Winnall as well. I mean, there are a *huge* number of people who worked

really, really hard over the years to monitor Wyre and ensure it's a really special place. And that's again, comes back to the 50-year vision for the Forest, that's now in place to ensure the right connectivity, hedgerow connectivity and so on throughout the Wyre. So, Wyre is an incredibly valued resource. There was a conference, couple of weeks ago, and we had lots of high-level people here, illustrated how fascinating people find Wyre and how it's very under, under-recognised in lots of ways, but is a very special place in terms of wildlife and so on. And Ruskin Land forms part of that and I think, what we hope to do in Ruskin Land, through the Guild's support and the Land Trust working with the Guild, is to do some woodland management and so on that would be difficult to do… we've been able to experiment essentially, with the asset, improve the asset for the Guild in terms of felling timber and so on, leaving the standing… good standing timber for future generations. And be able to make some beautiful, useful things out of it though having a sawmill as well.

I: How do you feel about nature then?

P23: How do I feel about nature, well…

I: All the things you are involved in are to do with the Forest, which is…

P23: …which is nature, of course, yes. You just got to value it.

I: I assume it's not only because you're a local resident that you get involved in this stuff, it must be something to do with nature…

P23: Don't know. [laughter] I think it just started because it was an interesting project, and then you get involved in the environmental bit, I know way more now about nature and environment then I did before. But there's got to be a sustainable future for assets like a forest, hasn't there, so that's the whole of nature, I mean it's ensuring that it's sustainable, a sustainable future, isn't it, for children and grandchildren type stuff.

I: I like that you mentioned the word "sustainability." What does the word mean to you?

P23: Ensuring that an asset, well, the asset, the nature is here for future, for future generations. There's lots of different ways of having things sustainable. I mean, the project here, to make it sustainable, you've got to have the community involved, got everybody in the community supporting what you're doing, whether that's

physically being volunteers on site helping implement the work, all the work that's being done here or whether that's just being, whether that's being in the local community or wider community and recognising that that's very important what's going on here, very important. So sustainability, it is ensuring that the same heritage asset is here for future generations.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special? You sort of partly answered it already…

P23: I have been, yes… Why is Ruskin Land special… Because it's the only place in the UK called Ruskin Land! [laughter] And it's one of the very, I mean, the Guild have got, have created opportunity now, haven't they… I mean, when Jack Bishop was here, we had a long period of no activity at Ruskin Land apart from somebody just living there and doing their own farming thing, which wasn't particularly Guild-related. I mean, he may have found out more but he wasn't, he was left to enjoy the land as tenant in his own right, and I don't think the Guild particularly took any interest in a pro-active way, as they are now. So, when Jack died, and the Guild took on, well, a) took on the St. George's Farm and let it to the Land Trust, and b) took on the management of the woodland themselves, it was a huge change in the way Ruskin Land was valued in those terms. What was the other one?

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land?

P23: Making it sustainable for the future. Again, it is that ensuring that whatever goes, whatever project unfolds here over the next few years, whether in… in 20-30 years' time, whether the Land Trust exists or not, there's still an asset here that the Guild can use in a productive way. I mean, whether that's, whether we end up with some sort of [inaudible] accommodation and a teaching facility, education facility or… we don't know yet, what we're going to end up with, but it would be really good for the Guild as an educational sort of charity, wouldn't it, to have an opportunity here for kids or young people or doesn't matter what age they are–people–to come here, learn a bit more about Ruskin and just being here. I think is very interesting when you talk to someone like Kate Darby, whose students have spent time camping here and so on, how much they value the peace and the quiet and just being here. Same with the 42nd Street students, they really enjoyed being

in the midst of nature and looking at big skies and creepy noises in the night not more than you might hear in the middle of Manchester, but were creepy nonetheless. They're probably not creepy at all, compared to the middle of Manchester [laughter]

I: You mentioned people who came here from a little further afield, Cardiff and Manchester. What about the local area or the local community, how is Ruskin Land important to them, what is Ruskin Land's role? Or could be?

P23: Again, I think we are, we've got quite a big project with education, there are 50 education visits to Ruskin Land and Uncllys next year. So we've got young children, we've got school-aged children, children under 16, I think from nursery up to 16, coming for farm visits to Ruskin Land or Uncllys. It's a slightly different offer from each place. But they're coming to be here and to learn what the environment… and how the, how the farm, the land's farmed here. Just learn very general basic things about being outside, being in the environment, and hopefully some of those messages start to rub off and they… then hopefully will bring other people, their relations and people into the Forest, and ask them to come back and see where they've been and the stories get back into schools. And you get a real exchange of information, hopefully. Lots of education visits over the next 5 years.

I: You mentioned some future plans and that you're not exactly sure what Ruskin Land might be like in an X number of years, but what directions would *you* like to see it develop?

P23: I think it is, it is continuing to encourage people to engage as volunteers because we have so many volunteers who value this, value being in Ruskin Land, value being here. And in that sense it's like a unique project in terms of there being a variety of things volunteers get involved with. And again, then they become ambassadors for the Land Trust and for Ruskin Land because they are doing, enjoying being here and then telling people about what they do. So you're spreading the word. How much the Ruskin bit gets worked in, I don't know, but the values of Ruskin, in fact that's underpinning it all. It's got to be helpful that people go away having had a good experience and enjoyed being here. And for a lot of people it's partly just enjoying being outside and being with other people, isn't it, so… In the long term, it's got to remain, it has to be sustainable, I mean the Guild

are generating, by felling timber in the last couple of winters, the Guild have created income and with that income, they then justify doing other activity here. We should improve the asset, buildings and so on, further.

I: So it's all… I mean, Ruskin wasn't that practical…

P23: He wanted his marble museum! He wanted to build his museum here, marble.

I: Well. He probably should have built a road first I think.

P23: Poor old William Graham had that problem, didn't he. [laughter]

I: Speaking about Ruskin, he said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What would you say to that?

P23: Yes, no food, yeah, interesting. I suppose it comes from earth, yeah okay [laughter]. Well I think, again, that's where, comes back to his philosophy of getting people out of the cities with Industrial Revolution happening and what he wanted to do, was help people to get out into open space, open air, appreciate nature. Which is absolutely what we can do here. He didn't quite create his Utopian society at the time, with residents at St. John's Lane and so on, William Graham didn't exactly get Utopia sorted, but in terms of an egalitarian type community now, and I think there's a *big* community around what's goes on at Ruskin Land now, it's created livelihoods. And a lot of people are working outside and enjoying being outside and it's got to be good, there are, we've got lots of stories of volunteers, of major health benefits of people having been here and been with other people and working outside, so it's still, that still resonates, the pure air. Whether we've got the pure water quite as well perhaps here… [laughter]

I: Pure earth as well.

P23: Yes, well, pure earth, that's again, you can learn about how the soils here shouldn't be disturbed and how they nurture the nature and so on.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P23: Oh God, that's another very open question! [laughter]. Oh gosh… I think it's a very interesting, the Guild have got a very interesting opportunity to do something really special here and I *know* they're looking forward. In 2021 there's suggestion that perhaps Ruskin Land becomes the focus of activities when the Guild celebrates the 150 years of the Guild, in 2021. So we may be looking at doing some different

activities here and again, promote… I think there's always going to be a challenge on Ruskin Land, between public access and "beautiful, peaceful, fruitful" being retained. And we've got to retain the 'beautiful, peaceful, fruitful' in everything we do, because otherwise you spoil the asset anyway. There's a real trade off there, between making people aware of what's happening here at Ruskin Land, making people aware of Ruskin Land, and ensuring that it doesn't get over, over used in any sense.

Participant 24

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P24: I've been involved in the Wyre Forest probably now for almost 40 years, both professionally and as a volunteer.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P24: Well, I help to coordinate the Wyre Forest Study Group, and we're a group of biological recorders, so we're all naturalists and we go into the Forest on a regular basis, twice a month, to record the wildlife, anything that we can find. We then computerise all the results and send them off to national recording schemes and to local biological records centres.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P24: Well, one of the things with the Wyre Forest is that the county boundary goes right through the middle, so you've got Shropshire to the north, Worcestershire to the south. For many of the biological schemes, they use vice-counties and if you look at the vice-counties, we've also got a third, we've got Staffordshire on coming down on the east side of the Forest. So therefore, historically, all the wildlife records have been split between those counties. And so, Wyre being very special for wildlife, we wanted to centralise the records and document Wyre as an entity.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before...

P24: Oh yes, yes. [laughter] I'd heard of Ruskin, read some of his books and been very impressed by the work he was doing many years ago. And it's lovely to see it being revived in Wyre, although there's not been continuous implementation of his work and his ideals, I think it's lovely now to see them focused on and drawn to more people's attention.

I: Ruskin Land is of course a geographical name on the map, so locals might know of it if not of Ruskin. Did you, as a local, know what Ruskin Land was?

P24: Well, I only moved here 40 years ago, so… but I'd known all about Ruskin because every year we used to go up to the Lake District for our holidays and of course he has, or had, a big presence there.

I: So did you ever wonder why the place was called Ruskin Land?

P24: Oh well, as soon as I saw the name, I made some enquiries and found out that there were links, and very soon met people whose grandparents had moved down with the first group of people in the Guild of St. George and that was some years ago. So I soon had some information about the background.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P24: How long have we got? [laughter] Well, the Wyre Forest is very special. It's an ancient, semi-natural woodland–although it doesn't look like it when you see the trees, don't look huge because of the coppicing regime that was implemented for many generations. But, actually, there are some very special plants, animals, fungi that live here, which live virtually nowhere else. And that's what makes it special. It takes quite a long time to tune into the woodland and to find some of these things. I always say, with the Wyre Forest, it reveals its secrets slowly to those with the perseverance to search diligently. And yet there are so many things to see. Many of them are very tiny, lots of little insects and invertebrates, but as you get your eye and look more carefully, you'll find some very special things. We're also on a bit of a sort of biological crossroads, so we have some, sort of species, that are in Wales, the extent of their distribution is about here. We've got eastly species that finish about here, and also there's a north-south divide. And so, we've got some… it's a very interesting, and probably unique, biodiversity as a result of that.

I: Does Ruskin Land have any special in the nature of the Wyre? Or is it just part of the Forest? Are there any species that are only found there?

P24: Well, we don't know for certain, but the very first Lesser Marsh Grasshopper was found in Ruskin Land just this year. And the other thing about us being in the Midlands here, we're picking up quite a lot of changes which are probably a response to global warming, climate change. And so things that fly, like insects, butterflies, that sort of thing, bugs, beetles, they're often the first to be found. And

we are beginning to find things which have previously had southerly distribution but are now moving up country and we're picking them up in Wyre. These are some of the woodland insects in particular, including some of the orthopterans, which are the grasshoppers and crickets, and so it was really good to find that first record for Wyre just this year, in Ruskin Land.

I: How do you feel about nature?

P24: Well… I just love all sorts of natural history. I just love the peace and tranquillity of natural areas and… But I love the detail, I love to see the incredible variety that you can find in a forest in particular. Ruskin Land is of course not just forest, there's fields as well, hedgerows, that kind of thing. So it's looking at, in Wyre particularly, the mixed habitats and just getting a feel for the great variety there is. And as you start to look more closely, the beauty of some of those little things is absolutely fantastic. So, although I love to know the names, I love to, love to know the Latin names, I love to document everything, in fact, I go into the Forest particularly with a great sense of wonder for the beauty and awe of the wild places.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P24: Well it does indeed, yes. We're all, those of us who care for the Planet, are really very, very concerned about sustainability and how we can make our communities more sustainable in their use of materials, their type of communications, travel, that kind of thing. But also, changing people's perspectives about how they can reuse and recycle materials, how they could use less petrol, et cetera. And that kind of thing. And it's a *huge*, huge issue that we ought to be addressing. I believe, more carefully.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P24: [laughter] That's fantastic as an ideal. Obviously, we can't all do that, and I think underlying all that, if that's the only things you'll need, there's an awful lot of work involved at [inaudible] stage, to live that life of freedom in the countryside. And I know, certainly, many of his followers worked extremely hard in Wyre Forest, because they sort of saw what we've got in the Forest, that's why the Forest is still here. Because the geology, it produces very acidic soil which is no good for agriculture, and so people, the farmers who came in trying to farm the area,

including some of the Guild people early on most probably, found that it really couldn't sustain much arable cultivation. And that obviously was influential in how they could live, what they could grow and use.

I: Ruskin said even barren land can be made productive, so I wonder what he would've made of St. George's or Uncllys...

P24: Well they certainly planted a lot of orchards, didn't they, and they had the fruit as an income. But, just even growing vegetables in the garden, it wasn't easy for them, I know that.

I: Would you say that Ruskin Land, that area, is special in any way?

P24: Well, it's particularly special because of its history and the links back to the past. Not just to do with Ruskin and the Guild, but also to do with the planting of the orchards, which I mentioned are part of the Wyre landscape and were a very important part of giving that area some income at that time. But, the area round the Forest roundabout is very special because it's ancient semi-natural woodland, oak woodland, but it also has some very interesting little microclimates, little wet areas, pools, stream sides, this sort of thing, little tiny bits of heathland, and I think Wyre, and Ruskin Land of course, is the add mix, the mosaic of small habitats linking together that make the whole so much more interesting. For biodiversity for landscape benefits, and that's certainly part of Ruskin Land as well as other areas of the Forest.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local community?

P24: I love the way that there's a Ruskin project going on at the moment that is actually bringing Ruskin into people's, to people's attention. And if there can be some more special events, displays, museum exhibits, that sort of thing, that can bring Ruskin's ideals and his lifestyle to the general public, that's a good thing I guess. And it keeps history alive and it also gives people idea about how Ruskin Land was managed in the past and how we're following those ideals into the future.

I: You mentioned the future, are there any future directions that you would like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P24: Well, personally, I would not like to see it too busy. There's such a tendency now, and a temptation, to find a nice place in the forest, and open it up to the general public. To put in all sorts of amenities, to increase the roads coming in to,

'Oh let's have a café here or a visitors' centre, let's put on big courses, let's build a great, big auditorium, so we can have big events to do with Ruskin.' And I believe that isn't what Ruskin would have liked. And also, it doesn't yield really, doesn't sit nicely with that sense of tranquillity and forest experience. So I'm… okay, I'd like to see Ruskin celebrated, but I do not want it to become too commercialised and to destroy some of the real, special features that are present at the moment.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin? You mentioned that you knew of Ruskin before you moved here, but involvement at Ruskin Land, looking at the ways they manage that land and what they put on, have you gained any understanding of Ruskin that you didn't have before? Has it changed your views?

P24: I've certainly got to know a little bit more about his lifestyle and… I was always very amazed that people should give up their jobs from up north, give up everything, move down into a non-productive bit of forest, which really wasn't very inspiring at that time, because of all the coppicing that had gone on and so on, and to dedicate their lives to follow his aims and objectives and so on. And his ideals. I was very impressed by that and thought, "Golly, that must've taken quite a lot of thinking and decision-making." But as I got to know a little bit more about Ruskin, and been to see some of the exhibitions in Sheffield and so on, and read a bit more about him, I can see how his ideals caught, could capture people's imagination. They are ideals and they don't always work in practice for everyone, so it's got to be very special and dedicated people, who are going to give up comfortable lifestyles to live the sort of ideals he had for self-sustainability–I suppose you could put it like that.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P24: …Yes, I'm looking at the map quite carefully to see exactly where Ruskin, the boundaries of Ruskin Land are… I love the fact that right in the middle of the Forest we've got this, this incredible gem of history, and I love the way that it's being proclaimed at the moment if you like. And I love the way that the plans over the next couple of years are to inform more people about it, I like the education element. I *love* the fact that there's artistic element to the work that they're

planning and what's going on at the moment with regard to all the arts and crafts. I love the sustainability element about using green wood, that kind of thing, and using renewable sources, the timber, the re-coppicing and so on. And I think all these features have a part to play in our local community, our local society. But also, if means can be found for telling people a little bit more widely what's happening, it lends itself to our current thinking about sustainability, so I admire what they're doing and want to support it in any way I can.

Participant 25

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P25: With the Wyre Community Land Trust or the Ruskin Land?

I: Both?

P25: Well, I'm not quite sure, my memory's not that great, but probably five-six years.

I: With the WCLT?

P25: With the Wyre Community Land Trust, but obviously that's always been based at Ruskin Land.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P25: a) because I was asked by John Iles, b) because I'm interested in the environment and in nature… Part of the project, originally, was maintaining the landscape in the Wyre Forest, and that interested me, getting new orchards planted and… Then as we moved on, the idea that we could manage the woodlands, bring them back into management, which they haven't been, which would then increase biodiversity as well and actually give people jobs working on the land and in the Forest, which all seems like a good thing, effectively.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P25: Well, my role… I'm on the Board of the Wyre Community Land Trust, so it's partly being part of a group that… agree on our sort of forward strategy and what we're doing, and then specifically what I've gravitated towards, is looking after money. [laughter]

I: John was assembling a team and he asked you to....?

P25: He didn't ask me to do that, he just asked me to join the Board. It was while I was on it, I realised nobody was really watching the money, so it just seemed like a sensible thing to do. And then my personal circumstances were that my mother was beginning to be increasingly frail and ill with dementia, and looking after money was something I could do from home, and it's enabled me to be involved without being on site a lot.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P25: Yes.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P25: Oh absolutely, yes. Because I've listened to… what's the lady from…

I: Rachel probably.

P25: Rachel! And the Master, giving talks about Ruskin and Ruskin Land. Yes, I've learnt a lot more. But I've always been quite… For whatever reason, I've found that, that group around William Morris and Ruskin very interesting anyway, and the arts and crafts movement, which is that sort of… Maybe I've sort of got an old-fashioned view of things, I've always gardened organically for instance, I like things done in a hand-made way, which is part of their view of things, isn't it, so yes.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P25: How do I feel about it, I feel… Personally, I couldn't live in a city for instance, I need to live where there is beautiful countryside around, and this area is particularly beautiful and the Forest is a… huge asset, I think, in terms of its… it's like a nature reserve really, and it's a beautiful place. It's a beautiful place just to walk through, it's unspoilt in lots of ways, we're not too near, we're reasonably near Birmingham, but it really doesn't get, apart from visitors at weekends, it is unspoilt countryside. We're not, we don't get as many tourists in this area as you would in the Lake District or anywhere else, so it's not over, overrun by people, so you're still feeling like you're in the countryside when you're in the Wyre Forest. And you can get lost in there and I have.

I: What does nature in general mean to you?

P25: To me it's just… I think it's… It's very important, because I feel like if I didn't have, if I didn't live in an area where I felt part of nature, I'd feel like I'd quietly die.

It's just... I hate being in, although, you know, I can enjoy a city, to live there forever is to…

I: …not for you.

P25: Not for me at all, no.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P25: That's probably in terms of physically living. There's something about emotions and people missing.

I: Oh yes, he differentiated between material and immaterial, immaterial were admiration, hope and love. But then the material things were basics…

P25: Pure water, pure air…

I: …and earth.

P25: Effectively yes, I agree with that, yes.

I: He meant that you can get your food from them…

P25: If you've got earth and you've got water and you've got pure air, yeah, you've got everything you need. Whereas, unfortunately at the moment, with… with the way the farming is, the earth isn't great. The water is being, has potential to be contaminated, and the air certainly, if there's all these diesel cars running around, is being contaminated. But it's… it's a slow poisoning of the Earth, isn't it.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P25: Absolutely. I'm very interested in it. Which is why I've always been an organic gardener, because you can't… I don't think that using chemicals on the land, in the long term, is good for land or the people. Although obviously there are problems with growing enough food around the Earth, the way that capitalist economy is set up means that the power goes to big agricultural companies who want to sell stuff. And quite often the wrong decisions are made I believe, in terms of how we sustain the Earth and people on. So, I think sustainability is… At the end of the day, if we don't create a sustainable society on Earth, we will eventually, the earth will bite us back and people will die.

I: According to the most recent reports, we have very little time to actually…

P25: Yes, that's what I read as well, yes. There is… I suspect that with, at the moment, global warming as it is, unless something catastrophic happens to change

things as it gets warmer, then there will be huge problems, and population extinctions. Yes, I see that coming. But the Earth will survive, just humans may not.

I: Well maybe that's a good thing…

P25: Well, they've had mass extinctions before but not made by man. This is one that doesn't have to happen. It's hard to see how to change… we can only do our bit and change what we can.

I: Do you think… What would be the better policy, for individuals to take action or should we wait for governments to make us take action?

P25: I think the only sensible thing is for individuals to take action and to lobby their governments to do something as well. The trouble is that even if you got one government to take action, if China or America decide to do the opposite, it's still going to be a difficult situation. And it is difficult for developing countries.

I: What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?

P25: Well, at the moment, it is an area with a really good biodiversity, it hasn't been managed for a very long time, certainly the woodland areas, but what we're doing is actually increasing biodiversity. It's an area where, because there hasn't been close industrialisation, there's not a lot of people living, demanding to live in the Forest to cut it down, we can ensure that we make this an example of how to manage woodlands well. Which can then be promoted elsewhere.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P25: Absolutely. At the moment with the Wyre Community land Trust, we've got a lot of volunteers that come down there, and I think part of what they get out of coming, apart from the individual tasks they do, is that it's such a lovely place to be. And, you know, we have a number of people who've come with mental health problems and I think, exceptionally, they've all found both the society and the environment helpful to them.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P25: Well, as we were just talking about. I think, I'd like to look at how we can increase the overall sustainability of what we do. So looking at each of our actions and saying 'Is that the best way we can do for the environment and for Ruskin Land?' And move forward like that. I think it's important we enable people to enjoy

the area without spoiling it. And that's always a tough one. You can't invite lots of people down to admire how wonderful it is without actually impacting it.

I: Especially if every person arrives in a car.

P25: Yes. But, in the sense that we, it's a community thing, we're asking people from the local community to come, we're not asking people to drive for miles to come, you know, hugely increasing in tourism, we're asking people… and a number of people do walk down there, but there's things for us to look at there. So if we can offer Ruskin Land to local people to come and enjoy, to perhaps walk there, to see… And some of these walks that we've had like butterfly walk or wildflower, it's not just that they come and walk, they come and actually get someone to explain to them what they're seeing. 'Cause you can walk in a forest and *not* see things. And especially if you don't know stuff. So, I think, getting people to appreciate what's there is very important.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P25: So this is a final bit which I had not thought of. I personally also am very interested in history and the actual historical significance of Ruskin, what he did and what the people he brought to this area did, I find interesting as well.

Participant 26

I: How long were you involved with Ruskin Land for?

P26: Two years, almost exactly.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P26: To do something very new and different when I retired; because I read a bit about Ruskin and really believed in a lot of the ideas; and because our friend Tim Selman, who was at university with Neil, told us all about it, so we were intrigued.

I: How would you describe your role there?

P26: Well, I was a volunteer. Definitely. But… Yes, definitely, I mean, I wasn't paid. We did get slightly less rent we paid, because we were volunteering. But I was a volunteer, and I saw myself being there as a volunteer because of my knowledge and education. And obviously education was a huge aspect to Ruskin's work. And

particularly looking at working-class or poorer people and lack of their education and access to beautiful things. So, that's always been part of my work anyway, working all my life in East London.

I: You were a volunteer, but you were also a tenant at the house.

P26: Absolutely, yes, of course. We moved into St. George's and we were there for more or less exactly two years. It was partly about a big life change for us, to live in a forest rather than in a city. To have a completely different experience. I really enjoyed it. Yes, absolutely, I was a tenant of course. And also became a member of the Guild. So it was a big learning experience. I rather liked that idea of learning something about something completely new. I learnt a lot from it as well.

I: You mentioned that you'd heard of Ruskin before getting involved, and you said that you learnt a lot. Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P26: Definitely, yes. I learnt a lot more about his extraordinary life, about his incredible cleverness I suppose, and his ability to do so many different things personally, but also the way he inspired others to be motivated to do all sorts of things. And also I really liked, 'cause I went to art college and my thing I suppose has always been being a visual learner and drawing and looking and things like that. So, the idea that you value things more greatly after you've looked at them, I've kind of always known that. 'Cause, when you draw something and you look very carefully at it, you know it so much better than if you didn't draw it, you might still look at it.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P26: It's an extraordinary place, a very, very beautiful place, very special place. Quite magical I think, Forest itself and the nature and all that it brought and all that we saw. That's it really.

I: What about nature in general?

P26: For me nature in general? Very inspiring, very therapeutic, very… constant. There's something kind of consistent about it, you know, human beings make such a mess of so many things and the trees still grow. In some places of course. And the birds still fly, in some places. So I suppose it's very much about that. I was born in the north of Scotland, in a little red house, I was looked after every day in a small

wee redbrick house in the north of Scotland, in beautiful countryside, so to me it was very familiar in fact.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P26: … Sadly that's a luxury for an awful lot of people, and I've been very fortunate in my life to have access to all of those things, all of the time. Although now I live in London, the air isn't so pure as Ruskin Land.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P26: It does. I have to confess, I'm not always sure what it means.

I: How do *you* interpret it?

P26: Something that's lasting. It is sustainable, it continues, it lasts. Anything that's an initiative or is a project or… obviously there are lots of things that sustained, that continue. As does nature, hopefully. Although even that is in doubt, now. Can't bear to think about that. Projects that are sustainable are ones that can stand on their own two feet and continue to thrive and to become independent. All of those things. I imagine that's what sustainability means.

I: When you were at Ruskin Land, what were your main objectives? You said you volunteered, you were also a tenant. What did you want to do there?

P26: My main objective, to be honest, was to enable, and this has been true, I'm sure it's a lot to do with my, I'm quite intrigued by this… I've done a lot of counselling and therapy and I had a very difficult start to my life, in relation to my care when I was little and so on. And so, through being a primary school teacher and through working with children, and trying to improve things for them, I do fully understand something about that healing process for myself too. So, the motivation for me was to find a school in Kidderminster, which was obviously, they were extremely poor and didn't have access to the Forest or beautiful things, so my main aim was to enable those children to have what I believe is everybody's right. Which is access to beauty, fresh air, water and soil, in different ways. And the other three things…

I: Admiration, hope and love.

P26: Exactly, admiration, hope and love. And actually, the school that we got involved with, Birchen Coppice, is one of the poorest in the country and the

children had not been to the Forest, none of them had been to the Forest, even though it was only 15 minutes away by car. So, I was really delighted to volunteer there for a year and build relationships with the children and the adults and the parents, and for them to come up frequently to the Forest. And now they are still coming to the Forest. And also, they had a pond in their gardens in the school where the pontoon was rotting and they'd never been able to do pond-dipping, 'cause it was too dangerous and they hadn't got the money to do it, and as part of the Lottery Fund that we got, project in February, that pontoon is being replaced with oak from the Forest. So that children for many generations will be able to sit and pond-dip in nature and draw. So I'm very proud of that, that's my achievement. I'm very, very pleased, because of what those kids really, really, a 100% needed and need. And if they can't get to the Forest, 'cause they used to come up in the van from the school that the caretaker was willing to drive them up. Because people can't come on the bus, there are no buses, people don't have cars, so people don't come. And also, the families are very big, so it's quite expensive to get there if you expect people to come in their own right. So, if they weren't able to go to the Forest, they have a fantastic, not very big, forest school where I worked as well. Which Charlotte, another person that might be worth interviewing, she takes the children, and she's the Community Worker at the school… So they get access to their own little forest, where lots of the wood from Ruskin Land had been taken. And also, there will be this pond now that will be accessible to the kids.

I: This leads to my next question about Ruskin Land and its importance in the local community… What kind of potential do you think the area has?

P26: Loads of potential. I mean, Neil and I worked really hard when we did the Lottery bid, along with Tim and Jenny, on thinking of all sorts of ways in which the local community could get involved. Obviously, the connection would be museum, the local Museum at Bewdley, but also we tried very hard, unfortunately like all things, not everything came to fruition. I felt passionately that the Forest should be more available to people from ethnic minorities and the whole community rather than just white middle-class people. So we spent quite a lot of time making connections and I did with young people in Birmingham, and we brought out several black and ethnic minority families to the Forest. I think… again, the idea of

kind of equality, and equal opportunities, and offering to the whole community, but obviously that requires a lot of work. So it could offer much more, but it requires really skilled work and really healthy relationships between the people who live at Ruskin Land and the people who live in the community. And a lot of work to do that, to build the trust and the relationships.

.....

So definitely, my feeling is that it has a huge potential to do that, but it's almost like there's a piece of a jigsaw missing. Neil and I worked very hard to build that jigsaw piece, and maybe with our roles no longer being there… I know Alice is there, the artist, and she's doing really interesting work, but it's actually getting people there and building the relationships. And it did take me a whole year of going every single week to the school to build the relationships and the trust. You can't do these things superficially or quickly.

I: The volunteer days are on weekdays, so it seems that only people who are retired can attend… Or self-employed. There's one person who's in IT and he can probably get away when he wants to, he's Polish actually.

P26: Good, they need that, there should be more. We did bring, I got in touch with the, there were 16 families from Syria who were settled in Kidderminster, and we did bring them up with their support group, for the Syrians in Bewdley and Kidderminster. And they brought the Syrian families up and it was a very special, very moving occasion. We FaceTimed Aleppo with the orchard, and showed people in Aleppo the orchard. It was a beautiful day and we had a lovely picnic and they all sang. I've still got a film of that. But unfortunately, that didn't continue.

I: Wasn't sustainable…

P26: It wasn't sustainable.

I: We're sort of talking about the future directions of Ruskin Land, what would you like to see? One is to bring different people there? Those, who aren't perhaps being considered as potential members of the community? Anything else?

P26: Definitely… I'm very respectful of Tim and the team who had done all the amazing work, I think they've done brilliantly and that's been really interesting. I think that should be maintained and invested in and developed and continue to develop in different kinds of ways. But I can't think of the things… Because they're

looking after the nature and they're looking after the woodland and they're looking, they're coming from the right angle in every possible way. And I like the link with the school is continuing and the link with the community is continuing, and it's just building on that very good foundation and developing it really.

I: Well, they have quite big plans, within the aims and objectives of Ruskin's…

P26: I think it would be really, really helpful if they were, the younger people were allowed to take the reins and take it forward into the future. I think sometimes… that's obviously being a challenge situation.

I: They have quite a lot of young people employed there…

P26: I mean more the leadership.

I: Well, I suppose a lot depends on how the organisation is run, if you have Directors then they have to have the means to be Directors.

P26: Well again, it would be interesting, wouldn't it, to get, on both, the steering committee or for the Community Land Trust, to have reps from, maybe, different groups too. In an ideal world. In the sense of younger people. Although, you know, there's brilliant people obviously already doing that. And I know that Jim comes from the college and things like that. It's a bit like role models, isn't it, you need to have both somehow, you need to have a diversity, in age, class and the community represented in positions of power. Otherwise things don't always move on.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P26: No I don't think so.

Participant 27

I: What does the word "sustainability" mean to you?

P27: To me, essentially it means that… It applies to processes or indeed outcomes, or activities, which depend for their continuation on environmental renewal and health. So for me, sustainability has actually its roots in the environment, the idea of conservation of, replication of and nourishment of natural resources. And improvement of. So when I hear that word, it's actually very close to the environment. But I think for other people it has a broader conception. It might relate to more of an economic agenda. Or indeed, a social agenda. And I think there

are economic and social dimensions to the idea of sustainability, but for me it's firmly rooted in in environmental capacity and how… So what I've given you is a very conceptual answer, primarily relating to the environment and natural resources, whether it's water or soil or… nature in a broader sense.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P27: I think they are vital. And I think not just in terms of being able to sustain physical life, but they are very much at the root of all forms of life-giving activities. Whether that's to do with food production and healthy food, or whether it's to do with being able to live in an environment which is not harming to health through air quality issues, or pollution issues. And obviously, water, clean water is critical in maintaining health in body and populations. I think those are very key elements. Did you say it's air, water and…

I: Earth.

P27: Earth. Yeah, I think that pretty much sums it up. I think there's an energy dimension that perhaps is missing.

I: The entire quotation says that there are three immaterial things: admiration, hope and love, and the three material things. And together, that's all we need.

P27: As I say, I think the material things are core, but for me, what's missing, is energy. Energy in the sense of the sun's energy, the wind energy, water energy. So, obviously, warmth, which is linked to energy production is vital.

I: Maybe this is what he understood by pure air, because if you have pure air, you can get sunshine, solar energy…

P27: Fresh air, yeah. But I think… I'm sure that wasn't missing from his thinking, but as I said, my immediate reaction is that there's a kind of a, not a good word for it, a kind of an engine or a motor, a driver of these things. Which you might call spirit, you might call energy, you might call… In relation to the immaterial things that he mentions of… Was it admiration, hope and love? Yeah, I think what underpins all of that is the human spirit, so I think maybe human spirit and natural energy are the two missing, unspoken components of those six essential things.

I: How long were you involved with Ruskin Land for?

P27: Well, very intimately the two years that we were living there, in Ruskin Land. And beforehand, probably for several years in advance whilst not being fully aware of Ruskin Land as a place, I was very conscious of Ruskin's thinking and the impact of his thinking on the environmental agenda in Britain, through my studies, through my graduate and postgraduate studies. And then since, we've moved back to London, we've been back here for about 18 months, still have maintained involvement and interest. So, including through working on the Ruskin in Wyre website and keeping in touch with the Guild and plans that have been developed for, to celebrate Ruskin's bicentenary next year. So, quite an ongoing interest. That goes back a number of years with a quite intense engagement with Ruskin Land for a short period of time between 2015 and 2017.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P27: Primarily being inspired by Ruskin's ideas and being fascinated by his early followers and their attempts to articulate their early ideas and by the opportunity that we were presented with, to live and discover Ruskin Land first hand. And to, thereby, learn a bit more about his thinking and the work of the Guild and the nature of that place in the Wyre Forest.

I: How would you describe your role here?

P27: … It was always a tricky one, I think our role was not well-defined, but initially, and that was part of what made it quite, at times quite uncomfortable to work out what our role was. But I would say it was a… My role, I think, was about trying to understand and articulate, for a public audience, the relevance of Ruskin's ideas within the Wyre Forest and the wider community, but also in relation to… environmental thinking in a national context, on a national scale. And so we attempted, I attempted to articulate that role through things like writing a blog, helping to develop the funding proposal to tell the story of Ruskin Land in a contemporary context, which is what happened through the HLF grant. I played… the main role in developing that programme and actually securing the funding. Obviously working with others, notably Tim, and to an extent Clive, and others in the Trust. And then to bring some of Ruskin's… in order to inform that project, hosting seminars, a number of seminars and events to engage different audiences, policy makers, environmentalists, arts administrators, established Ruskinians in

discussions of what's possible. And to bring more attention and focus and activity, relevant activity to what was happening in the Wyre Forest.

I: You said that you'd read Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land. Would you say your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P27: Oh definitely! Yeah, absolutely. My initial, my prior knowledge of Ruskin, before finding out about Ruskin Land and living there and getting involved in the project was fairly limited and fairly theoretical, and it related more to his general writings and his impact on others, notably Octavia Hill and William Morris. And the Pre-Raphaelites. It was very much an intellectual understanding, but quite a superficial one at that. And obviously, as we'd said, Lynne and I had been to Brantwood because we were interested in his life and his legacy. But when we visited Brantwood, we weren't aware of the Ruskinian community in Bewdley. It wasn't until Tim Selman introduced, informed us of that connection that we found out really about what was going on. So it was a huge revelation, to find out about his impact in that place, on people living and working in that area. And then provided an opportunity to try and understand more about his motivations and his ideas and his aspirations for that community.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P27: Blimey... I think Ruskin Land still is a hugely inspiring place and I think that owes a lot to the work of the Wyre Community Land Trust. And I think the Wyre Forest itself is a remarkable habitat and natural resource which has a lot to tell us about our relationship with woodlands in particular and with the land more generally. In terms of nature, I still think it's the fundamental resource in life and I think we need to be more, as a society, we need to be better connected with nature, we need to show it more respect and give it, work more in harmony with natural processes. So, I think, for me it's very important.

I: Do you think that Ruskin Land is special in any way?

P27: Yeah, definitely. It's special, for me, in that it is a place where there's a combination of the… a sort of philosophical approach to land and the environment as represented by Ruskin and his followers. And a particular place with a rich history and a rich natural resource and hopefully a very promising future. I think it's certainly… It's pretty unique, I think, in that sense. It's not unique as woodland,

nature reserve, although every nature reserve is unique in itself. I mean there are other nature reserves that are, as if not more, significant from a purely ecological point of view. But it's the combination of that sort of social element and the natural element that makes it pretty unique. I can't think of many other places in England where that kind of combination exists. There had been Utopian communities of a kind in Victorian, late-Victorian Britain, but… And I'm thinking of places like Millfield near Sheffield where Edward Carpenter had a land-based community as a kind of similar example, but I don't think it was quite as… And I know that Edward Carpenter to an extent was influenced and inspired by Ruskinian ideas, although he took a very different approach to the social agenda. It's the only one I can really… And there are, clearly, more religious communities where there'd been connections to the land as part of the Victorian back-to-the-land movement, but I think, there's nowhere that *I've* come across that's as inspirational, in that sense, as Ruskin Land. I mean, I'm conscious that I read, it was some time ago that I read the *Green Victorians* book and then Jan Marsh's *Back to the Land*, have you read that? The authors of these books talk about other, similar, experiments, but I don't think any of them really combined the power of Ruskin's thinking and approach to the natural world and a sort of coherent community and related social agenda. But maybe there are, maybe I just haven't…

I: I think none of them survived as long as Ruskin Land has, that's unique. Although it wasn't particularly active for many years–maybe that's why it's survived.

P27: No. Well I think, obviously the Guild's presence throughout that period has been significant even though, as you say, there isn't a lot of evidence that I'm aware of, that the Guild, between… over the last 100 years or so, has really had much of an idea about how to develop the… the project from a Ruskinian perspective.

I: I think it was more of an ad hoc management when Cedric and his uncle looked after the land, they knew the most about it. I can't see a plan for the area. The tenants were just let be if there was no trouble.

P27: Yeah, I think so. My very crude perspective is that in the late nineteenth century and in the first couple of decades of the twentieth, two or three decades, there was an attempt by people who were *directly* influenced by Ruskin and, in

many cases, direct contact with Ruskin to make a community, a coherent community there, but that was, as you say, difficult because of a lack of clear, or practical, vision. After the First World War I think and in the run up to the Second World War, I think the economic and political climate, and social one was very challenging in Britain. And then obviously, the Ruskinain… started to die and probably didn't hand on a clear sense of purpose or vision to their heirs or their descendants. And then, as you say, from the Second World War from 1950s through to quite recently, it was very much… the land as a whole was let out to tenants to do what they wanted to do really, but again, without any kind of framework or guiding principles. It's only the last decade really that, firstly with Uncllys and then with St. George's Farm more recently, that there's been an opportunity to develop this kind of agenda.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P27: Most definitely yes, I think it does. I think what's really good is that the volunteer network that's involved in various aspects of land management connected with Ruskin Land is really important. And indeed the schools, the contact with the schools that Lynne started to develop with Birchen Coppice which I understand is actually growing and developing into a broader educational programme is really important. I think what's really vital, for me, is those opportunities for different parts of the local community to connect with Ruskin Land in different ways. It's important that in providing those opportunities, that the whole story of Ruskin Land and Ruskin's ideas is presented. So that it is not just seen as another school visit to a woodland or another group of volunteers doing woodwork and landscape management, but there is a sharing of the ethos in the way in which those activities are presented to different audiences.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P27: Hmm good one. I think Tim's made a very good start in developing the woodland management, sustainable timber production approach and I think that's something that I hope will grow and become stronger and stronger. Because what's really important I think, is to link, to use Ruskin Land and the surrounding forest as a model for how woodland can be sustainably managed for nature and economic benefit in the long run in the UK. So I think that's an important route to take. I think

what would be nice, and what we began to explore in a very kind of exploratory way a few years ago, was how through various social media avenues, websites, Twitter, Instagram, Ruskin Land can provide a window for wider communities, within the UK but also globally into how community engagement with land and nature can be managed in a way that's aligned with Ruskinian thinking. I'd like to see that developed. And I think it would be nice if there were more curated, or managed, opportunities for targeted groups of people whether it's less privileged schoolchildren or people from poorer parts of the West Midlands conurbations, Birmingham and Kidderminster and Wolverhampton being nearby examples. Providing more focused opportunities, maybe even residential opportunities for small groups to engage with and benefit from closer contact with the land and the orchards and the trees and the animals that are there.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P27: … I think I probably rambled on enough. [laughter]

Participant 28

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P28: Since I became a Director of the Guild of St. George, which was in 2004. I can't actually remember when I first went there, I probably went there before 2004, but obviously it's while I've been on the Board, that I've gone there at all frequently. And most especially since I became Master, which was in 2009.

I: As a Companion, Director and Master, what's been your role at Ruskin Land?

P28: I don't have any particular role that's any different from anything else I do in the Guild. As Master, I'm responsible for the whole of the Guild, and clearly Ruskin Land is an important part of that. But it's very much delegated to the Director who happens to be in charge of it, which for most of the time I've been being involved with the Guild has been John Iles. Briefly, it was Cedric Quayle and it's now changing to be Jenny Robbins, though she's not completely taken over from John yet. So, what I, I suppose when I think about it, I think about my friendship with John, particularly. Because John has really transformed Ruskin Land in the sense of making it a thriving community and managing the Forest in quite a different way.

Much more energetically and profitably and sustainably. So, he's brought tremendous energy to the Guild project in the Forest. And that was very important for the Guild as a whole, I think. Before John took over, there had been a tendency to regard it simply as some properties that the Guild owned, from which it earned a modest income. And the idea that it should be something used actively as part of our objectives as a charity is really largely John's doing. I mean, I suppose you could say in a way that John revived what Ruskin Land had been in the early days of the twentieth century when the Liverpool Companions went to the Wyre Forest. It's a community again, in a way. I mean, it's not communally owned or anything like that, but they work together. The Wyre Community Land Trust is also an important factor in that they do the work of the Forest and they overlap with the Guild to a certain extent, the Guild provides funding for them, but they're also people who happen to live there.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land in any way enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P28: In a roundabout way, yes because… I mean, you must've felt it yourself, once you get interested in Ruskin, you become aware that Ruskin is interested himself in almost everything. And you don't necessarily have time to think about what Ruskin thought of a, b and c, 'cause you're thinking of d, e and f. So I don't suppose I thought a great deal about the Wyre Forest, interesting passage in *Fors Clavigera*, when he gets taken there by George Baker, and all that. But, actually going there and seeing what was going on there, takes you back to thinking why Ruskin wanted the Guild to own land, what he wanted to do with the land, how he wanted to create communities on the land. And it makes you also think about how that can operate in the twenty-first century, which, clearly, is going to be quite different to how it was in the late nineteenth century. So, I don't suppose in a direct way it illuminated what Ruskin thought, but it made me think about Ruskin's thinking, if you see what I mean. Does that make sense?

I: Yes. Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P28: I think it must be true, mustn't it. I guess we need other things as well, but they are the primary things, unquestionably, yeah. I suppose the operative word

there is “pure”, isn’t it? It needs to be clean water or fresh air, you need to be able to breathe freely.

I: How do you feel about nature in general?

P28: That’s a very big question. [laughter] … It’s easier to answer by saying what I think the relation of human beings to nature is perhaps. It seems to me that, as the quotation you gave to me just a minute ago suggests, we can’t live without nature. But also, we derive various kinds of satisfaction from our relationship with nature, from the beauty of nature, from the relaxation that we get from being alone in nature, away from the busyness of life, and all those kinds of things. I suppose, very importantly, we have a responsibility for nature. That’s to say if we don’t look after it, we will lose it, or it will go out of control and take over the world in such a way to make it unliveable in. So it depends on us to care for it. And I think that’s the essence of what Ruskin has to say about nature: that we are stewards. And clearly, people living in the twenty-first century must be aware that human beings have not treated nature well in the last 200 years, and that we are suffering the consequences of that and about to suffer terrible consequences from it. So I think… I don’t know if I’m being as coherent as I ought to be, but it seems to me that Ruskin foresaw all that, and it’s one of the things that makes him a great thinker. It also makes you think, very importantly I think, that what we call beauty, which a lot of people think of as a kind of cultural convention, some pleasant fiction that human beings allow themselves, I think it makes you think it’s a real thing, that beauty is connected with our necessities. In fact, you could argue that beauty is itself one of our necessities. And if we lose the relationship with nature, we lose that, and we lose the ability to live fully. Perhaps eventually lose the ability to live at all. So I very much agree with Ruskin about it. I mean, Ruskin’s view of nature is very much coloured by the language of his time, it’s very much a romantic view of nature, but I think it’s very valuable. I guess I have a slightly less exulted view of nature than he has, but I still think of it as being fundamentally divine, that’s to say, the thing which is given to us, which we have to care for. And I think if you care to join something like the Guild of St. George, you have to believe something a little like that. Yeah?

I: Does the word “sustainability” mean anything to you? If so, what?

P28: Yes it does, yes. It means lots of things, but I guess it means that our relationship with nature has to be a balanced one. We have to be aware that the world is an organism and, just as if you're looking after a garden, or looking after a child, you have to think of the needs of that organism, you can't simply do what you want with it, exploit it for your own benefit. You've got to think of its benefit as well. And you can take too much from it, you could damage it in various ways. I take it that that's what "sustainability" means, I'm not a great expert on this. I think it's a very important conception. 'Cause not a conception, I mean the word, didn't exist in the nineteenth century, but I'm sure Ruskin would've understood what it meant.

I: To go back to Ruskin Land, what would you say are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Do you think this area is special in any way?

P28: Well I think it's very beautiful, we've… actually through my influence, we've used a quotation from Ruskin as a sort of motto for Ruskin Land, which is "Beautiful, Peaceful, Fruitful," those three words, three adjectives which he uses in *Fors Clavigera* to describe the sort of land which the Guild wishes to have as its property. And I thought that that was a very useful expression, because everybody who likes the countryside, wants a countryside that is beautiful and peaceful. It's really what we go to the country for, we are largely urban people. But 'fruitful' is a complicated idea which adds to that a good deal. I think it expresses the view that we need nature to live, we produce our food by way of nature. So the land needs to be fruitful in order that we might live, but also in order that we might progress within it, I mean that we might earn income from it or articles that are useful to us. So wood can be used for making things, wood can also be used for sale, you sell wood and you make money, and the money can be ploughed back into the land or can be used for other useful activities in the locale you find yourself in. It's all really to do with having a relationship with nature. That relationship can involve activities to our profit as human beings, but it also involves caring for that other organism… I say "other organism", I suppose you could say we're actually part of that organism ourselves. I can imagine people coming along and saying "You shouldn't make profit, that's exploitation." That would be very foolish, it seems, to me. Fruitfulness is a good thing. And it's part of the whole process of nature of course.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P28: I'm obviously not an authority on that, I can't easily answer that question, but it seems to me that it does. It certainly seems to me that what the Guild is doing in Ruskin Land, particularly through the Ruskin in Wyre project, is of benefit to the local community and is obviously attracting people to the Wyre Forest. It's interesting, when I was, a few years ago, they set up the Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership trust, and they asked me for a few years to be a member of that Board, so I learned quite a lot about Ruskin Land and about the Wyre Forest at that time. And it made me aware that that part of the world, that people living in that part of the world… Two things: first of all, it made me aware that the Wyre Forest is surprisingly little known by people living elsewhere. But also, even more surprisingly, that people who do live there are not always aware that it is the Wyre Forest. That's to say, they know they have a landscape and they know that there are wooded parts of the landscape, but they often don't talk about the Wyre Forest. And don't use it very much. So, to make people more aware of that asset, seems to me a very good thing. Provided it's not over-exploited, which of course is always a danger once natural beauties become popular. So, I guess what the Guild does in the Wyre Forest is draws it more into the attention of local people and makes it more likely that people will get pleasure from it that would not otherwise have done. Have you come across this at all?

.....

It's very strange, and it's not in any way typical of Britain [to not appreciate its forests]. I mean, other parts of the country are visited, the New Forest for example is visited a great deal. So historically, it's rather strange. I think part of it… I mean, it *is* very big. Before recent years, it was possibly felt not to be a single thing, the Wyre Forest. Do you know what I mean? I don't mean theoretically, just the way people treated it. There's a bit of forest at the end of the road, sort of thing. Because in the nineteenth century it was very much an industrialised area. I don't know, it's very, very strange. And one of the things we talked about is that the most famous landscapes have a literature associated with them. So, most famously in England, the Lake District I suppose. You talked about Scotland earlier on, the Highlands of Scotland. These areas of Britain have been made famous by poetry and fiction. And there's almost nothing about the Wyre Forest, and I think that's

just an accident. It's particularly strange, because it really is very beautiful. Why do you think it is?

.....

Traditionally, the oak tree is one of the symbols of England. A forest made of oak trees somehow ought to be a magnet to people, but it isn't.

I: I heard somewhere, it may have been on Country File, that episode that Ruskin Land was in, that English oak is not really that popular in England as a building material…

P28: Yes. I think it hasn't been… This is something that we're engaged in in the Wyre Forest, it hasn't been properly exploited and one of the things that John and the Wyre Community Land Trust are trying to do, is, first of all, to produce trees that make better timber, by making them healthier trees really. And secondly, having done that, to market it properly. I remember going with John to see, I can't remember what it was now, but a business that makes furniture, to talk about them buying their wood from Ruskin Land and they buy their wood from France! And this was somewhere in Shropshire, I mean really near to the Wyre Forest.

I: Maybe in an interesting twist, now that Brexit is about to happen, this may change and people will start buying English oak because other oak will be more expensive or unavailable.

P28: It's a shame that it should be that that persuades it though. [laughter] The impression I got form this businessman, was that he would actually prefer English oak actually. [**I: He didn't know…?]** No, he did know, but it was too difficult. You'd have to ask John about it, I can't remember the details. But it was not satisfactory as a business proposition, it was much easier for him to buy French oak. It was something to do with the people who were selling the timber, but anyway, you ask John about it, I wish I could remember… In fact, I'd like to be reminded what the truth of that was.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P28: I'd like to see what we're doing there continue. Obviously, economically, for the timber business to continue is extremely good for the Guild and in a roundabout sort of way, I think it's good for the country too, what we were talking about, that it should exploit its own resources seems to me excellent. And of

course, as so often the case, if you make profit from a natural resource, if it's properly managed, the resource is not depleted, but it encourages the resource to develop and grow and do better. So that's certainly something that I would like. I'd like to see the community aspect of life in the Wyre Forest, which is already quite strong, I'd like to see that grow. Something we've often talked about is the revival of craft in that part of the world. Which, clearly, some of the things which Ruskin in Wyre has been doing promote craft. I'd like to see that developed as well. It's really… The vitality of it as a working landscape and attracting people of different kinds to come and live and work there really. I think we could be very good for it in that way.

I: You mentioned people coming to live and work there, what do you think about the Guild properties there, should they be rented out to artists or just any tenant? What does this depend on? These days only John and Linda are tenants who are involved with the Guild…

P28: I would like the farms to be occupied by people who have the Guild's interests at heart. That's to say, whose values are the values of the Guild or similar to the values of the Guild. People who support the way we want the Forest be run. The idea of having the Guild's representative on the Board, representative for Wyre, living in one of the houses, is obviously is very satisfactory. It's been very good to have John live there and John has developed it quite remarkably. We're still up in the air really about what should happen at St. George's Farm, but that principle applies. I haven't yet met people who are living there now, but I would very much like in future for the people who live there to be people who are in some way involved in what the Guild does, they don't have to be members of the Guild. These people, I believe, are quite interested in what we do.

.....

Something that interests me quite a lot is that there are plans that Ruskin commissioned, to design a museum in the Wyre Forest, I don't think that would work, personally. But the idea that a rural area can also have major cultural institutions attached to it is one that interests me a lot. Because it's not something that, on the whole, has happened very much. And that's been, in the past, for rather obvious reasons, I mean that you don't have enough people living in the area

for it to be viable. And Ruskin of course was hoping to build a community that would need facilities of various kinds. It seems to me nowadays, where all populations are much more mobile than they were in Ruskin's day, some sort of cultural development of that kind is desirable and probable really. I mean, it would probably be in Bewdley rather than in the Forest, but it would be good for something like that to develop, I think.

I: I heard of plans to move the little Ruskin Library from the Museum to St. George's and Tim told me they're planning to build more buildings there…

P28: Yes, that would be wonderful, to have a cultural centre at St. George's Farm, I think would be very, very good indeed.

I: I think it would be good for volunteers and people who come to the events to be able to leaf through books and actually see what Ruskin was about, rather than just hear briefly at the beginning of a workshop…

P28: Yes, I agree with you. One of the things I thought was when you and I did that *First Steps with Ruskin* teaching in the Ruskin Studio, I mean that's really in a sense the sort of thing I'd always hoped would happen in the Ruskin Studio. I know a lot goes on in the Ruskin Studio, but it would be nice to have more going on of that sort. Not necessarily all about Ruskin, but educational activities of one kind or another, yeah.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P28: Not off the top of my head [laughter] Oh, yes, I will say something actually! I'm going to retire as Master of the Guild this year, so my dreams for the future don't necessarily have a tremendous amount of significance, it rather depends on other people. But one of the things that I've always been keen on is for the different parts of what the Guild owns to connect with one another. So I was very pleased by the recent projects whereby the people from 42nd Street in Manchester came down and made their pergola for installation in Ancoats. What I'm really interested in, at the moment, in the Guild's future, is projects of that sort, which bring together the different properties that we own or have connections with. It might be Sheffield, for instance. And which bring rural people and urban people into relationship with

one another. You know, Ruskin has so much to say, I think quite rightly, about how urban people are denied access to nature for various reasons, one of which is ignorance. I think one of the things we should be doing, is to break that down and bring more people into relation with the countryside.

.....

We've had these two projects going, Ruskin in Sheffield and Ruskin in Wyre. Ruskin in Sheffield has been going for 5 years, used up quite a lot of our time and has been a very important project. I've always said that when Ruskin in Sheffield ended, the obvious thing to happen was for the two areas to link up in some way and Ruth might be the person to do that linking. Now, we haven't come to a decision on that yet, but that's on the agenda. It just does seem to me the obvious next thing to do. When you've had projects like that going, you have to think about the legacy of the project. You have to think how what's happened of value in Sheffield can be maintained in Sheffield. But it doesn't have to be the same thing that was going on before, you want to vary it and develop it, and I think going further afield and talking about the relationship between the urban and the rural is a very probable journey that we have to take.

Participants 29, 30 and 31

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P30: Seven years.

P29: I think… just over three, just over three years.

P31: Yeah, I'm probably the same as you, aren't I.

P29: Yeah, about two years, yeah. So, combined total is quite significant, actually.

I: Seven years… Are you the longest-serving volunteer then?

P30: No… That would be Les and Ken and all of those on a Thursday. They've been coming now for 10-11 years, something like that, haven't they?

P29: Yeah, I think ever since it was started, as volunteers. They were the original, as well.

I: Oh, I hope I get a chance to speak to them as well! What were your reasons for getting involved?

P30: I joined the Bewdley Apple Group to start with, which was based at the farm, and basically then I've carried on doing farm, Ruskin work for the Land Trust rather than the Apple Group, so…

[rooster]

P29: [laughter] Just for the tape, wasn't it!

P31: There was a lot of hemlock, wasn't there, in the field… Poisonous to the cows, so we had to pull it out, roots and all.

P29: That's the ragworts, wasn't it.

P31: Ragworts?

P29: I think it's, I started really to fill time when I retired as much as anything. But, I knew of Ruskin, 'cause a friend of mine used to live on this farm years ago

I: Here at St. George's?

P29: Yep.

I: Were you friends with Jack Bishop then?

P29: Jack, knew Jack and Nancy very well, and all the family. So I used to come up here, funny enough with my children, who are now 39 and 37 [laughter], so… And it was nice to come back full circle, it's just enjoyable, it's very enjoyable to put something back in, as much as anything. You get a growing appreciation of your surroundings, like doing today really.

P30: Yeah, I mean, I think that's the thing, that's partly why I came up thinking "It's going to be apples and orchards" and then you start to think, "Well, the cows are here and the land's here…" And it's also really interesting finding out what's going on in your local area and it's really nice being able to walk past the line of fence, walk with your family and go "I did that!" [laughter].

P29: It's just about land management [**P30:** Yeah, exactly.] as much as anything. To some extent, it would put me off buying woodland. [laughter] Because you realise, you can't let it just go rampant… you gotta cultivate it, you've got to look after it [**P30:** Yeah.], otherwise it will just take over. There's a lot of hard work involved actually, we try, I don't think… I certainly didn't appreciate it, put it that way. Until I came here. That, you know, woodland's woodland but certainly it's got to be managed.

P30: I think also as well, you suddenly realise how many amazing species there are around… If you're just going for a walk yourself, you think "Oh there's lots of pretty butterflies", but you don't actually realise how rare some of them are. And the different food plants they might need and what you can do to help those improve. Get those food plants growing in greater numbers, like the wildflower survey we've just been doing this morning… You look at a bit of ground and you just go "Oh yeah, well, it's grass, isn't it?" and then you start looking and you find there's 15 or 20 different species in there and they've all got a different place in the ecosystem and they're going to be feeding something which is going to be feeding something else and…

P29: You get quite an appreciation and understanding. It's very good, you get educated basically. [laughter] You're never too late! [**P30:** Yeah, exactly.] So that's worthwhile, very enjoyable.

I: How would you… how do you see your role here?

P30: I think we are quite essential… I don't think they could manage without volunteers, because really, there's only sort of 6 or 7 staff… And to actually get the physical work done, does need volunteers. It needs a lot more people than that to do it in the ways they need to do it. You could come along with a gang of people and just whack in a fence any old how and sort of slash and burn trees to either side to make the line and stick a fence in… But because we're trying to do it sympathetically with the landscape and also… you know, to try and preserve what's there, it does take a lot longer and a lot more time. And I think, for example, the… Les and Ken who've been coming for *so* long now, they've just got a way of building a fence without… They build it with love and care, don't they. They just seem to put…

P29: It's really… You can put up some ugly fences, or you can put it up so that it blends some more with nature. That's why… You do learn to do that. It is interesting, 'cause it's a… very much conserving what's there, but also looking to manage it, so that it can continue to grow in the future, as much as anything. As Mary said, I don't know how they would manage without volunteers, 'cause the fact is, I don't think they could. [laughter] [**P30:** No.] It's great fun, it's very, very enjoyable.

P30: Yeah… I think they need volunteers, I think that's where volunteers come with different skills, for example, when converting the volunteer area, converting this pigsty that we're sitting outside now… Couldn't have done that without the people who are skilled craftsmen and bricklaying and roofing and tiling and all of that. There's no way [**P32:** And the dry-hedge laying as well.] they could've done it themselves.

P29: You get the opportunity of having a go at things, under supervision, shall we say. And it's what I would call "soft supervision". If you get it wrong, you get it wrong and nobody's gonna start bawling you out or anything like that, and I think that's the nice way. You can learn from other people's experience, it's very good. It's all hard work [**P30:** Yes, keeps you fit!] [laughter]. Can be! [**P30:** It's an excellent excuse to eat biscuits!] Out cold and wet, yeah.

I: Had you heard of John Ruskin before getting involved at Ruskin Land?

P30: Yeah.

P31: Well, I know about John Ruskin, because before I came here, I knew that this was Ruskin Land.

I: So you knew this was called Ruskin Land and you knew of John Ruskin....? Anything in particular… Did you know him as an art critic or did you know anything of his ideas on the community…?

P31: He was a writer, wasn't he?

P29: I would only time him with the Arts and Crafts Movement, much as anything, [**P30:** Yeah.] William Morris and the rest of that, Rosetti and all of these… So, I didn't realise… On the land management side, which I think really, was just trying to look for his Utopia, wasn't it, more than anything, and what you could do with land. I've got mixed views on that side of things, because people who tend to have those ideas… They were grand ideas, but they were wealthy enough to try and put those ideas into… get them to try to work, because they were wealthy enough to be able to do it. The poor man in the street, or the poor man in the forest who was trying to make a living as a charcoal burner, to be honest, just trying to scrape and do what he could, his first forethought was probably to make a living. Not worry too much about the environment [**P30:** Exactly.] or what he may destroy in the process, he's got to look after his own family. So you can look at it from another point of view,

say “No, if you manage this properly, his returns are gonna diminish.” Or would’ve done in those times…

P30: And if you look at what he did to William Graham, just sent him out here and dumped him basically… That was just along the way to go around… If you want to get somebody, want to help somebody achieve anything, that was exactly the wrong way to go around it… There’s been so many more people that could’ve helped him, more people who were more suited to coming and trying it out and then… You know, for example now, you can go and woof your way around working on organic farms for a year or two and learn about farming and then start your own smallholding, can’t you, you don’t… You would never, well, you’d be mad to just say “Right, I’m just gonna go live in this area and expect to be able to live a decent life.” It would be impossible. So I think… He was a great visionary, but equally, you’ve got to place him in his time in the late Victorian era and look at what else was going on around there and what they considered important at that time, and maybe our ideas now about the place of women, the place of people from other cultures, has changed as well, what we consider would be acceptable… Some of his ideas maybe don’t stack up in modern times… What goes around, comes around, I also volunteer for the National Trust and he obviously was, you know, somebody who said starting something like the National Trust would be a great thing to do. And let’s face it, if it wasn’t for the National Trust, then we’d have many more caravan parks on the south coast. That’s fine, people’ve got to go on holiday somewhere, but there’s equally… we’ve got areas of land preserved, or *con*served rather than preserved. I think that’s another thing you have to be aware of, is conserving, when you can’t preserve [inaudible due to wind] sustain exactly like this, because environment does. We’ve global warming going on, and that’s going to affect how woodlands and fields and rivers and everything else changes over time, quite apart from what *we* might choose to do to it. And I think that may be something that you maybe have to modify his, Ruskin’s views in this day and age really.

P29: Yeah, there’s a big difference between preservation and conservation [**P30:** Yeah, exactly.] You can conserve, but allow the thing to grow, if you just go for preservation, then effectively you’re trying to keep status quo, leave things exactly

as they are. And that doesn't always work, it doesn't work with buildings, it doesn't work with a lot of things.

P30: Well, this discussion they're gonna have to have with Notre Dame, isn't it, we've just had the fire there. Do you put it back *exactly* how it is, or do you say "Well OK, let's take the chance to put in sprinklers and water and, frankly, toilets in a building that's going to be used by thousands of people every year. Do we need better office space with more light in some places and that makes the building…" Maybe it's not an argument for somewhere like Notre Dame, which is an iconic building, but for smaller buildings, smaller areas. Can you actually make it more usable in the current day, and then maybe the building or the area can then have a life. Whereas otherwise it becomes a sort of a… basically putting up signs saying "Keep Out, don't come in, you're not allowed, you can't do this, you can't do that, because, because, because."

P29: It's exactly the same with the land, isn't it [**P30:** Yeah.] But Ruskin is… I haven't read an awful lot about him, I'd say he seems complex, I would say he was more a visionary than, shall we say, an actual doer. Bit of a philosopher, he came up with the right ideas and the right concept, but actually putting it to practice… Maybe wasn't too keen to get his hands dirty? I don't know. [laughter] But he wasn't unusual in the Victorian age, as you probably know. Certainly in the UK. We had a middle and an upper class, who had the time and the education to have these sort of ideas and thoughts. But for the great unwashed as we say, the majority, it was a struggle to stay alive, let alone worry about… So, as I say, it's a bit mixed views because… William Morris is similar, had these great ideas for Utopia, almost veering on socialism, fantastic idea, but they all lived in mansions with servants [laughter] [**P30:** Exactly…], so it wasn't always put into practice.

I: And Ruskin wasn't exactly an egalitarian either…

P29: No.

P31: Wanted it to be his own way.

I: Sorry?

P32: Did he want it all his own way?

I: Yeah.

P30: Yes. He wanted people to live as he dictated, didn't he, rather than how… And you've got to balance the environment you find yourself in, the situation you find yourself in, haven't you, against…

P29: I think it can be all [inaudible]. I mean, if you ask people down the town, in Bewdley, they know the Ruskin connection, or know of it. But I think they probably visualise him as being some sort of romantic figure, to be perfectly honest, rather than…

P31: Didn't he write the… *Pilgrim's Progress*?

P30: No, that was Bunyan….

P29: No, he was… I mean, he was a good artist in his own right, so you could say he was qualified to be an art critic in that respect, whereas others… It's easy being a critic, isn't it… [laughter] [**P30:** Yeah.] You got to be able to do it first!

P30: I think he was a product of his time and the upbringing and, as we've said, you've got to look at his ideas in that light… You can have ideas and you can have an ideal, but then, you've also got to live in the reality, as we've been saying. You've got to be able to draw, you've got to be able to live. And the bottom line for the Land Trust, as things are today, is they've got to be able to make enough money to keep going. And, whether you like it or not, money is essential in this modern day society. You know, come the Third World War and we're all reverting to living in small camps in the woods or wherever then it might not be so essential, but in this day and age you cannot, you've got to break even. There's no two ways about it.

P29: Many years ago, Paul McCartney bought a big farm down in Sussex… From the Beatles? And he turned it into a model farm as he saw a model farm. Linda, his wife, was a strict vegetarian, so the animals were kept and just lived their natural lives. And at one time he was [inaudible] 'This is how we should be going.' Until somebody pointed out, "Well, if you've got £300 million in the bank, yeah, you can run a farm like that, but if you've got to make a living, as most people have, it's a slightly different philosophy." It's interesting. I think Ruskin, as Mary says, was a product of his time and had some good thoughts, good ideas and we're still talking and practising some of them today so…

I: Since we're already talking about Ruskin and his ideas, he also said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What would you say to that?

P30: You also need companionship…

I: Ah, but these are the immaterial things, this is just half a quotation, I have to admit I'm trying to trick you slightly…

P30: [laughter] Yeah…

P29: No, no, that's pretty true, ideally. Yeah, why not. But we haven't got clean air, have we? [laughter] What was the other, sorry?

I: "**Pure Air, Water, and Earth." He did say, love, hope and admiration…**

P30: I think certainly soils is becoming a big, big thing now. Soils can store more carbon than all trees put together on the planet, if they're looked after well. And in the last 50-70 years, since we've been using pesticides on soils, the soil health has really, really plummeted…

P29: I think people are far… In Victorian era, when it's just come up to the Industrial Revolution, I think that's really when they were picking up on air pollution [**P30:** Yeah.] and water pollution. For instance, in Kidderminster, there's the Stour, which runs through one of the supermarkets which used to be carpet works. The colour of that used to change depending on the dyes which were being used that day in the carpet factory…

P31: And there was slime on top of the water…

P29: Yes, slime. And it would be bright red one day, it would be orange another day… when I first moved here, which was in 1980, those sort of things were still happening, whereas now, there's trout in that stream. Right in the smack middle of Kidderminster, and it's a very clean bit of water actually when you walk through there. [**P30:** Yeah!] So people have become aware of it, which is a great thing. And it's current with these school kiddies, protesting about the change in the environment, it just shows you what you can do, to be honest. You can't argue with these three…

P30: Yeah, as a very blunt tool to get started, then yes. If you look at something like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, starting with the physical at the base, then yeah, absolutely. You can't really add or detract from that, because without clean water,

clean air people can't… And what do you call living as well, if you've got severe asthma or… I've got a family full of hay fewer sufferers at the minute and they're all confined to quarters at the moment, can't go out [laughter], so yeah, absolutely right.

P31: Can I interject there? When I was, it was quite long time ago, we used to visit… There's a firm called Albright and Wilson, they're chemical-makers, and when we went outside, your tights would just rot off your leg, 'cause of the phosphine gas that was coming out! And we were breathing that as well!

P29: Yeah, that was all over the place, wasn't it, it was pretty bad.

P31: Especially in where I come from, the Black Country.

P29: It has got better, without any shadow of a doubt, we do recognise the problems. But the problem is, we can recognise it, it's a difficult one, for anyone, politically to handle, isn't it? Because we recognise that we need to control it, if you've got an emerging country that's just coming out, they're doing the same industries that we were doing and we're offloading all our old computer stuff down to these countries where they're dismantling mercury and God knows what's in it. It's terrible, but we're the ones shipping it out there! [laughter] It's not on my back door, is it! [**P30:** Exactly.] I can see an emerging country think "Well, why are they telling us what to do, they were the worst polluters for donkeys years!" All of a sudden we're wealthy enough to say "Well, we can look for alternatives."

P30: And equally, our lives have become such that, for example, to drive up here every day, it's 3 miles each way, so that's 6 miles round trip. There isn't a bus to get here; if there was public transport would I use it? Probably not, because I like, I've got used to being able to jump in my car and go when I choose to go. In Ruskin's time that wasn't available, everybody lived and worked pretty much within a mile or two from where they lived, because what else could you do? There was no time in your 12-hour day of work to go anywhere. My husband travels round the world for work, there's no way he could've done that without the society we've got today. And that's allowed us to live in the lifestyle we want to live in. Fifty years ago, you would've probably travelled by train to an office and back again and would've barely travelled and if you did travel, it meant getting on a ship and disappearing for three months or something. So, we've developed a lifestyle in this country

which is going to be very difficult to get [**P29:** To break away from.], to break away from.

P29: Well, I think the youngsters, in fairness, would probably win to break from it. [**P30:** Yeah, where is possible…] My daughter lives down in London and it's amazing how people have been tolerant about the current demonstration that's been going on. And in the way the police have handled it, you could say they've been too soft, I don't know, but there's been no turning of water hoses on people or anything like that, water cannons, it's just been… And it shows you if you have a mass movement, you could actually paralyse a country quite easily. I mean, if everyone did what they were doing, something would have to happen, because otherwise it'd come to a standstill, full stop. It's amazing what you can do! "People Power" as they say, rightly or wrongly. Something would have to be changed. We'd all like to change, but whether you do in practice is another matter. Like our friend Ruskin in fact, great ideas, but [laughter] practicalities!

P30: Exactly…

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest or nature in general?

P29: Well, living round here and having friends and family up at the weekends, they all comment it's the most beautiful place to live. And it is a beautiful place to live. I think that's Roman for Bewdley, isn't it, "beautiful place"? [**P30:** Yes.] I think that's where it came from. And really, anything you can do to sort of conserve what you've got in the environment as far as we can, recognise it's a living space and people can share and enjoy it. And yeah, it's brilliant. And Ruskin Land is a small part of it I think, really. But it does highlight it.

P30: Yeah, I think that's really important, it is a small part, but nevertheless, it's an opportunity to show what can be done in a small area. And certainly we're trying to make the Forest more productive again. Again, goes back to trying to give people local jobs…

P29: It's like reinstating the orchard here, isn't it, which was quite a lot of hard work. To what it was. When Jack was here, this was cleared as pasture for grazing of cattle, so it's almost gone full circle, we've got the trees, the orchard's back, but we're grazing cattle again, which didn't happen for quite a few years. Yeah, it can balance itself out quite nicely. But, most people you see walking through, they do

appreciate it, the area. I think it's quite well controlled round here, it's quite freely available access, but you've got to want to find it, I think [**P30:** Yeah.] The road to the Forestry Centre, that's easy, but other places… it is available, access is available. But it's restricted in terms of parking and that tends to affect people. Ones who want to go, will seek it out, I think.

P30: Yeah, I think it is really nice, 'cause it is deciduous woodland with so many different things in it, animals and plants and things. It provides a really nice contrast for people who want to get off the beaten track a little bit. Having stood in the Museum for several days, an awful lot of people coming in saying "Oh, I didn't even realise you were there." You know, "Yes, we've walked past the farmhouse, but didn't know what it was." Then they say, "Oh, can we visit the farm?" No, 'cause it's a working farm and we do have Open Days, look at the website, see when the Open Days are or come and volunteer… I think, you have to be a little bit aware of nature getting sanitised, and being nice and clean and presentable and you can come and walk through a meadow, and we promise you won't be stung by a stinging nettle type thing… [**P31:** Or tread in a cowpat.] [all laugh] [**P29:** That's part of it.] Yeah! But then here, it is still rough and ready, I think that's actually one of the beauties of the place [**P29:** It is the attraction of it, it isn't pristine.] Exactly. [**P29:** It's not a model farm.] Definitely.

I: Well, farms never are pristine are they? There's always going to be some animal waste or machines…

P31: Better out in the fields than in stalls somewhere, you know, with artificial light and things like that…

P29: It's a good environment… The environment around here has cleaned up enormously, the carpet industry has disappeared and upcycling has taken its place, to some extent. But I know when I first moved here, if you wanted to see buzzards for instance, you had to go to mid-Wales, it was the nearest point. [**P31:** They fly high, don't they…] Whereas now, they are over here, they are over in Kidderminster, so something's had got to improve for that to actually happen. And in my understanding, buzzards tend to go for natural food, you won't see them coming into gardens and pick anything else up [**P31:** They find mice, don't they.] Yeah, so, if they can find enough food, then it must mean something's improved, to

be perfectly honest. Small rodent types are thriving and the buzzards are coming in. So yeah, there's definitely been improvement. [**P31:** They're quite majestic…] And the Clean Air Act… I used to go up to Staffordshire a lot, Stoke-on-Trent, when I was a lad, my gran lived up there. Now, I can remember you could not, with the combination of what were called pot banks, where they used to do all the pottery, were coal-fired, wood-fired, and you'd have the big steel works and the chemical works. Combination of the two, it was literally, you couldn't see across the road some mornings. And that was just this yellowy hue and then they brought out, I think it was in the 60s, the Clean Air Act. So they now had to use smokeless fuel. And I would say, literally within two-three months, the transformation was enormous. Resistance on it, but once it was done, it was done.

P30: Yeah, I think sometimes you need sticks, don't you, a bit like the London Congestion Charge. Sometimes you just gotta say, "This is how it's gonna be, get on with it."

I: So, do you think it should be done by the government then, restrictions…?

P30: I think, unfortunately, it has to come from a central point, because people can then argue with… it becomes a faceless thing that people can grumble at. If it's done by a small organisation, for example over at Kinver at the moment, Kinver National Trust, there's a big argument about whether or not we should cut down some conifer trees that've reached the end of their life and the fuss and the people… Again, just aren't listening to reason or argument as to why it might be a good plan, these conifers have reached the end of their natural lives anyway and if they're not removed, they will start to fall down on top of them. It's just unbelievable and people can assume that they can give… It's fine to give an opinion, but then to get angry and start coming out with pseudo-science as to why it's a bad plan to remove these conifers and not listening to what's actually going to be happening, what's going to take their place. Which we, every single, every other sort of organisation, conservation body or whatever, is saying is actually a really good thing they're, the Trust are trying to do. So it's better sometimes to have a faceless body, like the government, just saying, "Well, you've got to do this, get on with it." And on the whole in Britain, I think we're fairly good at obeying rules, so if somebody says to you, you've got to do that, you're gonna do it [laughter].

P29: You can only govern by consent, and really, the people have got to be in favour, and as more and more education is going on… My two little grandchildren, in their school there's a big movement about the environment, and they're extremely aware of it. Even at sort of 5 and 7-8 years of age. [to **P30**] You'd know that better, because of your teaching experience [**P30:** Yeah.] They're extremely aware and they get… I wouldn't say frightened, but they're very very much concerned when they talk about all the plastics in the ocean and all that [inaudible]. It doesn't take much for a group of little school kids to suddenly start picking up plastic bottles… [**P31:** I've seen it in Goa. And Liverpool [inaudible], and every time a tide came in, there was cartons, milk bottles that people have just thrown in, and it was filthy. You wouldn't swim in it.] I think that's gotta be the big movement, it's getting better at… shall we say, controlling waste and processing it, and there's still a lot to be done. [**P30:** Yeah.] Lots to be done.

P31: They have to put everything in plastic, don't they…

I: And everything in plastic packaging as well, you to a supermarket and everything is already foil-wrapped…

P29: Some say to go back to the days… Just look at those biscuits for example [pointing at an open packet]. Mary would just about remember, I'm quite a bit older. You used to go, you'd go into a shop, a grocery shop, and there would be large tins of biscuits and you would have half a pound of those biscuits, they'd be put into a brown paper bag. And you think, "Actually, why aren't we doing that again?" It's quite a sensible way of doing it. I think one or two supermarkets started something along those lines. The more, the better really.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P30: We've just been talking quite a bit about it! Yeah, I think sustainability is actually what've just been saying basically. You've got to have the basic, the difference between conservation, preservation and making anything sustainable. Sustainable basically meaning that it can continue in whatever form. So, it's whether or not the Land Trust can get enough money to keep going, whether or not they've got enough volunteers to keep doing the work that needs to be done, whether it's… are the cows having enough calves to maintain the herd or, God forbid, half of them died, that would be unsustainable… It's whether or not the

woodwork enterprise can start making some money and is the wood that's being cut down, are they having to cut down more than can be replaced. That's sustainability for the Land Trust, and for the wider aspect of what they're also looking at when it comes down to cutting down… maintaining the landscape in a way that we would like it to be maintained. So that it is going to be here in another one hundred years' time, in a format that's *fairly* close to what we've got today. I mean, like we've said, you don't want to preserve everything, you've got to conserve it, and who knows what actually will happen to climate change…. It would be great to think these oak trees will still be here in a 100 years' time, here's hoping that the climate will allow them to be there. And the grey squirrels won't have nibbled off the tops [laughter] and got rid of them.

P31: I've seen the red squirrels up in Scotland, they're tiny. They're very bright, they're only about this big [indicating size].

I: We have them back at home, we don't have grey squirrels, so I was quite surprised…

P29: Another import…

P30: American import, yeah.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P31: Well, if they redo the Bunyan *Progress…*

I: *Pilgrim's Progress?*

P31: Yeah, it tells you everything you need to know. Look after it…

P29: It's a difficult one, I don't know to be honest, I don't know how many people see it as any relevant. I think I wouldn't necessarily associate it with conserving the land around here. I think they just think it's probably down to the Forestry Commission, Natural England and small groups such as ourselves to… I don't know about that one to be honest.

P30: I think... I think probably, having stood in the Museum, with the exhibition, a lot of people have been quite impressed seeing that he helped launch the National Trust and I think that's possibly a way in. But, and I think it would influence a few people, the vast majority of people, as we've been saying earlier, are caught up in the day to day grind of keeping body and soul together. There's a lot of hidden poverty around here, people who are bouncing along the bottom and I think for

them, to make it really relevant, bringing Ruskin in, is just of very little relevance to them directly. Kate works with Birchen Coppice Primary School… they're able to come out here because of Ruskin. And so you can have an indirect relevance I think. Does that make sense?

P29: Yep, I would agree with that.

P30: Yeah, I think you'd have to *explain* Ruskin to people, in this day and age. Which I think would be… I think it would be unnecessary to explain it unless people started to become more involved in the group.

I: Do you mean that Ruskin Land has more of a role than Ruskin?

P30: Yeah, I think so. And certainly… [**P32:** It's something people can visit.] And I think that the fact that Ruskin Land is here and is maybe ran on the lines that it is, allows Kate to work with school groups, because if, say, for example, what they needed to do here was… I mean, yes, they need to make money, but they also have a need to educate. So, if they needed just to make money, there's no way to have people around the wood yard, because that just doesn't work, you've got to focus on the money-making enterprise and health and safety and all the rest of it. Whereas because you've got the Ruskin element, it does allow the education side and it does allow people to come out and visit and take time. And like Eric was saying, with us volunteering, we can mess up a fence and they can go "Oh don't worry, we'll get the boys to come back tomorrow and sort that one out. [laughter] Have a slice of cake." [**P29:** Absolutely.]

.....

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P30: … I think more gentle education. I think at the moment, there are many places, like Eric said, schoolchildren are getting more and more aware of what the environment and the land could be, and it's becoming a really hot topic to sort of reconnect children to the land. I think that's fine, but you also need to reconnect their parents to the land, so I think there's a big gap between our generation and the current generation, the 20-30 somethings who've really missed out on getting their hands dirty.

P29: It's been a… The children have almost been wrapped in cotton wool because of the changes in the way people live. Whereas when I was growing up, we'd go off

all day when we were 7-8 years old, go fishing, do what we really liked. It seemed a much safer environment from that point of view. And the trouble is I think a lot of people… There's this horror that the children, if you give them some woodworking tools, they're gonna come home with no fingers. While in actual fact, with a little bit of training, children who respond to it, do extremely well. We've been doing this wildflower survey, to me, that's a great thing for small children just to get on their hands and knees to see what's underneath them, rather than just walking through. [**P30:** Yeah!] I think they'd find it fascinating. Anything to do with bugs as well, kids love bugs. If you can find something where there's a lot of… [**P32:** Like beetles.] Yeah, beetles, spiders… They absolutely love it. It's just seeing this and getting them interested.

P30: And if you think how quickly kids learn names of dinosaurs, just think, if you had a 7-year-old with us now, they'd've done that wildflower survey in about half an hour. They just know, they've got the sort of mind that can remember the facts and the details and go "No, no, that's not speedwell, *that's* speedwell, because…" And you'd be going, "Oh, yes!" 'Cause our heads are full of what we're gonna have for supper tonight and what we need to do tomorrow and have we packed this or that…

P29: My son's down in Bristol, in a school, a city school, and he'd got children who'd never seen a cow, haven't got any idea where things are from [**P31:** They don't know where milk comes from, do they…] Won't eat fish if they see it, but love fish fingers! It is, it's true! And it is education and once… they're so curious, naturally curious, kiddies, that's the key, to my mind. Is to get the children to [inaudible]. You've got to be careful not to be dictatorial or something, giving them your own views, teachers got to be careful, but at the same time kids are naturally curious and once they get an idea of it, they'll come home. I think that's where this could go, as Mary was saying, greater on the education side of things. If it's gonna be as it is, it's a natural piece of land and…

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P29: I think the Forest as a whole is just a fantastic environment to have right on your doorstep, it really is. And it is appreciated, you've only got to see the number

of people who come from Birmingham and everywhere else. And generally, I would say 99% of them respect the environment. I do a lot of walking through the Forest and for the number of people who use the trail on the old railway line, you rarely see a lot of litter about which to me is an indicator that people do respect it. And it's improved. Again, when I first moved here, there was a lot of litter, plastic litter, a lot of water bottles and that. I wouldn't say it's rare to find it now, but it's not as common as it used to be. [**P30:** No, exactly.] You still get the occasional someone will roll up and just throw everything out of a car window and leave it behind where they've parked, but it's the exception now. So I think people have become much more aware of it and it's human nature, if an area is clean and tidy, people will leave it clean and tidy. If you let it go a little bit rack and ruin, then if it's looked unkempt, then it won't be respected. And I think that the thing here. It's not, you can't keep it spick and span, but if you make the effort to make it so that people become aware that it is a nice environment and it's worth looking after, then they respond to it. Everyone responds to it.

P30: Yes. I think it's really important that people get the chance also just to come out and see the landscape as it actually is, rather than, say, on *Countryfile*-style sort of… You need to be able to see it, smell it, touch it and really get involved with it. I think that's the great beauty of Ruskin…

P29: Funny enough, I had one or two people say… I like watching *Countryfile*, have you seen that episode…?

I: Yes.

P29: I was talking to somebody the other day and they've said, "I never watch that programme, it's too middle class." Actually, if you think about it, it is! [talking about the episode featuring Ruskin Land] To say "This is beautiful, this is what we can do, don't let anybody come in and mess it up." [laughter] Which has probably given the wrong impression to be perfectly honest, you've got to be welcoming, I think that's the key. You've got to welcome everybody in. And now we've got a lot of cyclists that go on with the mountain bikes and it can be annoying sometimes. It's quite interesting, you can have a conflict when people go walking and cyclists come along [inaudible], they seem to go along like that, and then you find one of these walkers maybe next week is going to be on his pushbike [laughter], these attitudes change!

There's room for everybody, but there's got to be a little bit of give and take. But I think, you've got to welcome everybody in to start with.

Participant 32

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P32: Since… It'll be five years this year that I've been coming on a Thursday and then two years I've been coming on a Tuesday.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P32: The key reason was for my mental health. Back in 2013 I ended up being hospitalised and then, as part of that, in my recovery, I became aware of the fact that conservation volunteering was something that people did. I'd never done it before. I came across a person… Actually, I met someone in hospital who I then met again later, and when I was helping them, they actually used conservation volunteering as part of their care, shall we say?

I: So it was recommended to you?

P32: It was something that that person was doing and I was supporting them, so I went out with them for the first time. And I thought, "Eh, this is good!" … That was down in Essex, so when I came back up here, I came to look for somewhere and I... Without being negative, I went to the Wildlife Trust and offered my services to them and they didn't get back to me. And I just happened to see in the press that the Trust was advertised and I put that down in my folder that this was something I'd investigate. And then when the social worker was talking about things I said "Oh, I might go and try there." And then they brought me here. And actually they didn't give me a very good handover, but Sally was excellent in terms of picking me up from the other side. It's been very good for my mental health from that point of view, because one of the things we've discovered, in my own recovery, is that nature itself can be very grounding. So, if you have emotional, volitional and mental issues, you can almost see them as the higher issues. But if you come down to a physical level, you can resonate with nature, it can give you a grounding. Because of its continuity. And it's complexity as well, it can give you a challenge to your mind that's beyond what you're thinking, but in a settled way. So, the fact that a tree's

been there for three hundred years and you're struggling say from one week to the next, it's like kind of a softening of the harshness maybe of everyday rhythm.

I: So you can come back the next week and know that they will still be here…?

P32: Yeah. The idea that a number of trees have been in this space for a particular period of time, just that challenge is to know that we as humans wouldn't want to stay in one place for a hundred years. Or 50 years or whatever. But then the fact, if you contemplate a tree and the way it's then developed, you can almost look at the stresses and strains it's put up with over the years in the way it's developed. That sort of gives you a level of meditation almost upon the other being, as such. Or life force, or whatever.

I: You're already talking about trees, so maybe you could tell me how you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P32: It's a cyclic story really. When I was a child, I lived in Singapore and saw the jungle and all that sort of thing, and real depths of nature, and I learnt to swim there. And then when I came back to the UK, it wasn't the same. And I was trying to tell people about it and they didn't believe what I'd seen. When I was a child, we lived in Pembrokeshire as well, so we spent a lot of time on the beach, collecting cockles and winkles. And then we moved to another part of the country and it was the same, you're trying to talk about something that, an experience of nature… When I was in Cornwall, was it Cornwall…Yes, Halston in Cornwall, they went out to the park on a school thingy, and I found a red Campion flower. I brought it back to the classroom and I started to draw it and I said to the teacher, "I could make my own book of these things." And then she, the following day, brought in a book and I was disappointed that this book already existed. But then I had that enthusiasm about it. … From then on, I went to a naval boarding school where I didn't really engage with that. And in some ways… I taught computing for 20 years, so that side of me was in some ways, on a back burner. So having come to Ruskin Land has brought me back round the other side, shall we say? So… But, having said that, I didn't know it was Ruskin Land when I came, I just came to do some conservation volunteering. So that's an additional story.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin at all before starting at Ruskin Land?

P32: In the background. If you'd asked me, I might've been able to tell you possibly that he was related to the pre-Raphaelite painters, or I might've told you he was a critic, art critic. Possibly. I say possibly, 'cause I'm not sure whether it what I've learnt since I've been here or… I think I would've known Ruskin was a Victorian, that's probably what I would've said. Possibly. I wouldn't have known any more details than that.

I: So your involvement here definitely enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P32: Well, since then, given the nature of the person I am, soon as I found out, I then did some research into it. Because part of my mental health presenting things… Because I've been through the issue of becoming disillusioned of institutions and structures, etc., then my safe… My health and safety approach to going into a space is to research exactly what's happening, so I feel safe. So if there's a particular issue… Because it was Ruskin, I thought I'd better look up what this is about, because it might be something I become uncomfortable with. So then that's why I've had to, in some ways, as things develop, be careful about how I respond to it. One of the things within that, one of the early times when I was first here, it wasn't to do with here, but someone mentioned another place that they'd been to and it triggered in my head because of my experience with that place. So I had to develop like a health and safety process for myself because of the way I relapsed as the result of it.

I: So you're happy with who and what Ruskin was…?

P32: Philosophically… In some ways, it's quite an interesting thing about today really, and this actually [meaning the interview], because it's given an opportunity to reflect upon that and have a conversation about it. I don't feel totally that that happens in some ways… But then part of that fits in with the conversation that we had previous to that, about what I term… I don't know if you've heard of the term "praxis"? So, in terms of whether it's that actually happening or is it an artefact thing. So, the actual idea of coming and doing the volunteering is the praxis, isn't it, and the other part is the commentary on it. So in some ways, there's tension between which one are you coming for the experience of. When we're conservation volunteering, we don't spend all our time talking about Ruskin, but then the fact is that when it is mentioned, it then *can* become a discussion.

I: I suppose the volunteers are more about doing things and the Trust decision-makers consider theory…

P32: That's what I've been talking about. One of the questions… One of the things I've personally found hard is the distinguishing of the differences between who's the Guild, who is Wyre Community Land Trust, who is Ruskin Land and what is the thread of them.

I: Do you think that matters to know who is who?

P32: In some ways, because my personal perception is that the group dynamics can change depending on who it is that's explaining the narrative of where things are. So, my perception is, that if a person is a member of the Guild and a Companion, then that's seen to be more of an authoritative thing. Whereas… That's my perception. And then part of my own ten, say, commentary on that is that, and maybe that answers one of the next questions… Part of my commentary is the whole idea of St. George itself gives you almost an Anglo-centric perception of the world. And today's world should be more international and global. And George himself wasn't necessarily just British, if you look at his heritage. So part of the Guild in my opinion is almost, or the Ruskin thing, is about Britishness, when actually George himself wasn't about Britishness as such. It's like he was adopted as part of the Crusades, while actually if you look, he wasn't a crusader so much, in a Protestant way. So it's like a myth that's been created around… As we were talking, there's a myth being constructed around the language and then depending on how you relate to the language, and depending on how integrated you are in the specific community… So, if you're a member of St. George's Guild, then there's a particular thing that you've agreed to be part of, whereas if you've come to be part of the Trust, it's something else essentially you're feeling you're part of. But then sometimes you hear there's a commentary from somewhere else that's contributed to it. And then if you volunteer, as opposed to full-time member of staff, then there's a different perception, so there different things… That's a natural part of communities, isn't it, that people have different roles and different emphases.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest?

P32: I find… This is a place I've come to treasure. My girlfriend, I've come up here with her, to show her the space that I enjoy being in and it's been good for her.

She's found it to be a safe space as well to come to. That's good, in that way. In some ways maybe it might unsettle me when there are issues that might destabilise that, which is why, as I said, I need to quantify that with the different narratives from that point of view… I almost have to put myself back into… The actual nature of the place, if I've come back to that, that brings me back from the emotional, rational and spiritual kind of dynamics that suddenly jump in. I can back off… and say: "My main reason for being here is for the physical resonance" and then capture the appropriate narratives from a different level and say, "Just wait, you're here for the natural resonance, for your health."

I: Do you come here also outside your volunteering days?

P32: Yes. Parts where I have access to, obviously people live here and have their lives, so there are certain spaces I don't come into.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth."

P32: My response to that is that it's a slight dilution of the Celtic perception of having those three, but having fire as well. So my question is, why would Ruskin be hesitant to have fire there. Part of that would be possibly did he have an issue with passion, with things being out of control sort of thing… Did he not see almost some of the ugliness in life as being beautiful as well, is there a level of control that's part of Ruskin, part of his… This part of him when he was shaped as a child was very structured in a very Evangelical, Protestant way and is there a way in which his journey with pain became something that he closed down? Passion and whatever, 'cause there was issues with his sexuality as well. Part of the irony would be that if you look at some of Turner's paintings, then they go into steam and the energy of fire and that. I'd be interested why, whether he'd related to that, to Celtic spirituality and… 'Cause some philosophies have those four dimensions, the four elements. Fire was one that isn't there.

I: No, he didn't include fire, but he did talk about emotions, immaterial things.

P32: But the dynamic of fire is missing. One of the things that he appears to… the idea of coming away from the industrial to nature, and obviously there's this dynamic that people see manufactured structures as not being as natural as natural structures while each of them have a nature in themselves. It's like qualitative and

quantitative. You have the quality of nature itself because that's something you can't grasp, whereas if you've manufactured something, you can grasp that quantity. But maybe that's because we've got the language to hold on to it, whereas nature itself challenges us with the language other than us. I don't know. That's my question, why is fire missing.

I: Maybe he thought that these three were enough to make fire?

P32: I appreciate that, but what I'm saying is that, with being the person that he was, I'm surprised that he didn't relate it to the Greek philosophy. I mean, if you take the history of, say, British education, then part of Classic education would've been the Greek dynamic of the elements.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P32: Yes, considerably. As part of my rebuild, shall we say, from my mental health point of view, I became aware of the fact that there are such things as the Millennium Development Goals. And then in 2015 they became the Sustainable Millennium Development Goals, which were backed up by doing a world-wide piece of research for young people to see what they wanted to do. So, the Sustainable Development Goals, which are supported by the UN, are seen to be the development between now and 2030. So obviously "sustainable" is the key part of that and the key part of what I'm wanting to do as a person internationally, is to be part of that. And then what I've discovered is, sadly, that the UK, which is the Security Council member, hasn't been following in that as well as we could be. So, that's something I'm wanting to try and be part of, something I've spoken to people like here, but the sad thing is, that most people aren't aware of them. In some ways, that's part of the resonance journey, sustainability as part of this project, is part of a bigger project I'd see myself as being part of. As a business start-up I'm trying to create, I'm trying to develop an education programme called Unique, and the key part of that is the Sustainable Goals on an international level. With the dynamic of personalised space as being the other tension and then compassionate communities in the centre. So you've got those three parameters. Sustainability is part of all of that: international sustainability, local sustainability, personal sustainability.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land is special in any way?

P32: Yes, clearly for myself, 'cause it's part of my personal journey. Yes, also because it's attempting to relate a narrative form the past and going into the future, and it's attempting for that to be alive and dynamic as well. Although, as I said to you before, part of the tension with that is to whether it's an artefact, and Ruskin himself and his philosophy is an artefact, or whether it's an actual praxis being developed that's more alive, shall we say. Rather than just being a museum. I was quite taken back when I saw the exhibition, to see that at one point in time there was a plan to have a museum built here, on this space [laughter]. And what that looked like, and how it would've actually worked, compared to what we've actually got here.

I: Do you think that what we have got here is better?

P32: Yes! Because this is a natural development of this space, isn't it. I suppose that's part of my fear of what Ruskin and the Guild could end up being like. An imposinality on the space, say "This is how we're going to make it natural." Which by its very phrasing shows it isn't natural, 'cause you're trying to force it. It's a bit like hothouses and greenhouses, which almost gets us into greenhouse gases… To what extent is intervention still part of the nature of things.

I: That's quite a good question, especially in this forest. You look at it and think this is natural, because all the trees are the same height. And then you find out that's bad!

P32: Well, that's because it's been pollarded, yeah. It's a conversation I was having with someone at the weekend actually. They were saying to me that they were shocked at how much the trees had been chopped down. And I said that if you look at that side of the forest, all the trees are the same height, because it's a pollarded forest, which is why they end up like this. So, in order to get it back to natural, you've got to intervene *again* to take it back to its natural shape. Which brings you back to that sustainable part, is the intervention we as people are making, is sustainable for nature as well as ourselves. Maybe that's what Ruskin was saying about the industrial part. Maybe the intervention we're making is for our own sustainability and not for nature's sustainability. And because of that, it's not actually good and healthy for humans. 'Cause we by our nature, are a part of nature. Are we in danger of letting language dominate who we are as people as

opposed to the nature of ourselves? It's back to our uniqueness as people and part of nature. 'Cause that's what you come to see in the forest, is that without intervention, certain species can come to dominate the space. And we, by our responsible intervention, can actually help the species to interact and grow and make it more dynamic.

.....

That's the challenge I gave this person. I said, "Do we intervene? You said it's a lovely place. Well, it's a lovely place because of all the work we've been doing here. If we'd left it the way you want it to leave, then you'd see it as that over there, dying. Why is that dying? Because that particular species have taken over without any intervention. So which it is you're wanting?" And that then becomes a challenge between your personal story and the community's story and the global story and how they interact with each other. And we each have different perceptions on that. So really, that's why, to jump back to the fire thing, in some ways I think one of the dynamics that's interesting about what we're doing and what we're talking about, is how do we resolve that conflict from different narratives. If you've got the story from the past and you're trying to go into the future, how do you resolve the tensions between them, 'cause of different things involved. And which one's seen to be the one that's more important? So which one are you going to sustain at that particular point in time.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P32: Yes. For the very reason I've just said. ... It has the power to be an education space for the community. At various levels. By its physical level, but also by allowing for emotional engagement through creativity and just by the fact it exists for a space to engage with people, allows a dynamic and conversation to develop.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P32: I'd like to see a part of it more overtly educational. Without it affecting the dynamic of the natural process. It's the tension, the danger is that it becomes an artefact just to be observed. Which in itself could have a level of education. But in my opinion there's an additional power if it's a dynamic praxis. So, you can have the practical, hands-on praxis and then you can have the related things, like what we're doing today, the surveys and whatever. Then there's also the engaging of schools…

Part of my fear is that the story in away has been rescued, but where is it gonna go next, for the next generation? Is there a process in place for the younger generation to carry on the story? Most of us here are an older generation, so where's the responsibility for passing on that story? Which is maybe what hasn't happened until now, they had to resurrect the story. The question is, what the story is as a result of this. Because there hasn't been that continued living, almost like passing on from the elders as to what it is. And I think that's the challenge to ourselves. You'll probably find that a lot of people from this community don't know that Ruskin Land exists… Like the exhibition in Bewdley, people so close as Bewdley don't know that it's happening. So that whole idea of what's being learnt from it. And that's one of the things I mentioned to Kate originally, when we were reviewing something years ago, like we're doing with the survey: how much documenting is taking place for other people to see what's happened as opposed to… Okay, we're getting a lived experience, and that's part of us, but how much is there to be passing on to other people, what we've been experiencing and what was being developed. My perception is, and maybe that's part of why you came to be doing what you're doing, my perception is that there's a lot of that've riches that existed not being continued with and then being discovered again at the moment because suddenly there's an interest in it. So it's actually maintaining that archive as ongoing living thing.

I: What is the education role of this place then?

P32: In terms of just them as themselves, increasing the empowerment and discernment of the person… My personal belief is that, if the Ruskin idea had evolved further, it'd be an international perception… So, you've got the beauty part maybe of the nature and the peaceful piece in my view would be the courage to engage in conflict resolution… So the actual community-building part, I think that's some of what we're struggling internationally… Also this comes into personal politics and value judgements taking place in the space, between different groups. I sense that there was a dynamic in moving from Uncllys to here that was, there's been issues as to which space is the appropriate space and part of that was the sustainability question as to who is going to be sustaining it, which particular group, and where the sources, funding was coming from. Which is why if it was going to

develop an educational point of view, it would be something separate from the part of the Trust that's doing what it's doing at the moment. 'Cause otherwise it would distract it from doing what it's doing. By its nature, I think, almost hijacking Ruskin, is making it even more evolutionary and evolving and natural in its process, being less structured. So maybe putting more of the passion and fire back into it, of individual life. It could be in danger of some of the life, what the aspirations are, could be lost in the narrative, because of it being too wordy, rather than being reflective of the spirit of individuals that come into this space. So much like the, if we identify the particular species, the plant, we'd nurture it, it would be a space where everyone feels nurtured when they come into it. And this may sound idealistic, but it's actually… It's part of the place being a peaceful place rather than just being the nature. The actual whole community should be one that encourages healthy interactions, shall we say.

.....

Part of my bias is that I come from education background I suppose, so from my own experience of education, I've seen… Well, with work that we've done with Birchen Coppice School as well, I can see that the experience of education out in this space, how valuable that is for children who are used to, what I call, the institutional, industrial education that just treats them within a certain box. And you can see the life coming into the children, just 'cause they're in this space. [on a heard of deer that the schoolchildren saw while at Ruskin Land] It was like a real treasure for them. So that's the sort experience, for any person, whether you're young or old, that you can discover here.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P32: Don't think so.

Participant 33

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P33: … 2014, 13… So about 5 years on and off.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P33: And Open Day and they had a walk-around. So they showed us all they were doing at the time, they were based up at Uncllys Farm, so there was a walk around all the land, showed us all the orchards and all the conservation projects. And after that, I ended up with all this spare time on my hands, was looking for my next career change, so I decided to come and start volunteering up here to see what conservation work was like and whether it would be something I'd be interested in pursuing as a career.

I: So your role here has changed over the years…?

P33: I started as a volunteer and volunteered for a couple of years here. Then I applied for a position of a wider career trainee which used to have, that was funded through European money. And that was a project that they had going on for five to ten years. So then when that ended, they had different people every year come and complete a course and that gave you an NVQ, it gave you a working background, and it also had funding to put you for any extra training that you needed to do. So like, I took on trailer-driving… 'Cause obviously a lot of it involved moving the cattle round, so that meant that I was then able to fulfil that role. And then, with the other money that was left on the training, I went on a brush-cutter course. That's for any shrub clearance, knocking back bramble and bracken. So that could also tie in to potential jobs going forward. … So that had finished, it was a six-month programme I was on. I then was back volunteering while I was looking for other work. And then the opportunity came up over the winter months to work in the forest with the forestry team. 'Cause when you do all the forestry work, so I then came back for three months and was helping out with the felling of trees along the rides to help widen them to let more light down from the canopy. And then also that timber was going to be taken off and used for multiple purposes, firewood and for processing into planks and timber for construction jobs. Now I'm back again and volunteering.

I: Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?

P33: Beforehand no, it's not something I'd heard of before this thing had come up on either Facebook or Bewdley Museum. There was a flyer just saying that there was an Open Day and a walk going on, so I thought I'd come and have a look. And that was the first involvement I'd got with Ruskin.

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P33: Completely, 'cause I didn't have a clue who the man was before.

.....

A lot of his work ties in to the Arts and Crafts movement, the early to mid-nineteenth century. And of course it tied in with things like Gertrude Jekyll and Lichen, who was doing all the building work and Gertrude Jekyll was doing all the gardens and she was looking at incorporating woodlands into gardens and having these nice gardens with formal areas and then transition into the more wooded areas, taking us back to the country ideas…

I: Would you say that you're interested in the thought, the underlying principle of this place? Does it come up at all?

P33: Does it come up in my work… I suppose on the community side of things, it comes up a lot on that side, 'cause that's about getting people out in the countryside and getting them back connected with nature again. But when I was working here as a trainee, then yes, that was involved, 'cause you were working with the volunteers. So that was that part of the aspect. Then on the forestry side of it, there was a lot less, 'cause we were managing the Forest more for the natural conservation of the Forest. Those were the key goals, not "Can we link this to the people and this bloke," but, "What can we do to enhance the nature and what we've got here already." And provide better habitats for key species that are in the Wyre Forest.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P33: I think they need a little bit more than that. [laughter] Yes, you need good clean air, good clean water and good clean earth. But then, you also need to understand how they all connect to each other and how we can live in harmony with the air and water and nature that comes out of those. You can't just look at those three and think that's what you need, a, b, and c. We need an overarching mosaic of everything interconnected to each other to be able to move forward in a sustainable manner, as opposed to a culture of "Get it and throw it away."

I: You've already mentioned "sustainability," what does it mean to you?

P33: It's working in conjunction with nature, not working against nature. A lot of what modern society does, it goes in and rips out what nature's put there to then put in what they want there. But really, sustainability is looking for what nature's already put there and looking at how we can increase the use of that. In the Wyre Forest we've got these beautiful oak woodlands. Now, there's no point going in chopping it all down to turn it into a cattle farm, but what they've done here is the orchard pasture at the top. So, they've still got the woodland cover, but there's a few less trees than there would be in a normal, overgrown woodland like it is at the moment. Which is then letting light through, which means the grass can grow and all the wildflowers, which then provide better food sources for insects, which then links to better food sources for butterflies and birds…And then you can also have the cattle grazing going on on site, so you've got another avenue in that. So, it's using in more harmonious way of what you've already go provided for you by the natural world.

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P33: Strongly positive! [laughter] I think it's… Mankind, since it first developed on this planet, has always been affecting nature in some way, that's just how we are as creatures, that's how we've developed. But, we've always, in the past, there was always a sustainability and connection to the land and to what was there. So everyone knew what… You know, we've done this wildflower survey today, people knew what they all were. But we were doing this group for the purpose that actually we don't know what these are, we need to learn what all these different flowers are. Then, from there, we can understand how they interact with everything else and how that provides a better… sublayer of soil to provide a better food source for butterflies and insects, then on to birds and things. … Connectivity. The modern world and farming, everyone used to farm for themselves in a sense, everyone had their own veg that they grew, but no one does now. So without going back and learning all these old skills again, all we're doing is we're getting very selfish as a society and coming in there, and going, "Well, I want a nice four-by-two house with a nice square garden and I don't want to mow the lawn, so I'm going to put astroturf down so it looks green and pretty but I don't have to do anything with it." Now, that kind of behaviour is non-sustainable, because it can only carry on for

so long before you reach the tipping point and it goes boom and it's gone too far and you can't go back. So coming out and doing this conservation work, is part of that trying to protect what we still have left. And looking at all the species that are in massive decline and looking at the habitats we have and all the species we have that are key in this area. And then doing the best we can to provide a better habitat and hopefully keep that population not only there, but strong enough so that population can then grow. And then hopefully we're working in connectivity with other local organisations providing new habitats that they can then move into and colonise. So, if we have any major events because of global warming and what's happening with the planet now, that there are enough different areas of these species, so that it's not just one swoop and the whole lot gets wiped out. If you've only got them in one area and something happens in that area, boom, the species gone and you've lost it. So as long as you've got a connective route and some different key holds for them, and strongholds, then that means if one does get wiped out, then you've still got a base of these species left, so they can still… You can then work and reintroduce them back into the area… I mean, the key examples in the Wyre Forest are the pearl-bordered fritillaries and adders, so there's lots of work being done–not by the Land Trust but by the Butterfly Group and Natural England–looking at clearing the wider rides. Which is also part of why Ruskin Land and the WCLT have been widening rides in their area, that's in conjunction with Butterfly Conservation. So when the light comes down, you've got all the flowers that pearl-bordered fritillaries can transit from one area of the Forest to another though its natural habitat.

I: Would you say that Ruskin Land is special in any way?

P33: Yeah! Very special. … It's replanted these very young orchards which, as Bewdley used to be a massive place for orchards years and years ago and most have been chopped down, there's very few old orchards that've survived. So they've come in and realised that's the key area of what was part of the ecology of this woodland and reintroduced that. So that's also then helping further on through the food chain for those animals. It's then working with the community, it's got very close links to places within town and the people, and the Museum, so it's helping people come back in and connect to nature again. They have ran events all

throughout the year that people can come, like I did, for a guided walk and see what's going on. They also have other events such as the looking back at ancient crafts in the forest, so it's showing people those old skills that used to be in the forest that are lost, that used to be all part of the management system of the Forest that isn't there anymore. So when people wonder why they're going in and chopping down all these trees, it links into the fact that "Look, in the ancient way it was managed, they would've been chopping them down and using them for this. But, because we live in a world of plastics, we don't manage it like this." So we need to still go in and find another way of doing that management job without knowing that we're not going to be using that material in the same way they used to use it for, looking for new avenues to put that material in to, provide a use for it. So we're not just chopping it down and then going, "We've chopped it down, what do we do with it now?"

I: Would you say that this is Ruskin Land's role in the local community, to educate people?

P33: Education is a key part of what people who are lucky enough to work in places like this should be always focused at doing. 'Cause there's so many people out there that have no real connection to nature apart from their lovely maybe mown grass, a few border plants and looking at all these lovely documentaries on TV. But actually getting the word out as to why is nature so important and how it all interconnects and so how doing one thing you may think, "Well, it's only gonna hurt that." But actually, it's not, it's hurting everything throughout that chain further on. And it's… it's not ignorance, it's just a lack of education through the school system and the way people grow up and develop. Unless they're out in the countryside and working within the industry, they just aren't aware of the issues surrounding it.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P33: Hmm. They've done an awful lot since I've first started coming and volunteering with them. They've increased their work area, they've increased the volunteer opportunities for people to come here. They've had funding, we've got this wonderful volunteer centre now, it's been modernised and has full facilities for people to use. They've got the wood yard at the top where they're not only just processing firewood, which is what they used to do, they've also got the sawmill up

there and can also turn those and make gates and benches and other wooden materials and stuff… I suppose mostly getting more events going for people to come and experience the land. Maybe having kind of interaction days, when people can come in and look at how the timber is harvested, and then brought in, and then what that timber can be turned into…

I: What do you think of that idea to build more housing here?

P33: The opportunity for more people to come out and live here, I think that would, as long as it was done in a sympathetic way, then it could help enhance the area. A lot of conservation work is manpower, it's about having the right amount of people to be able to do all these small jobs that need doing all the time. And you go back to years ago when the farms had all these farmhands, there wasn't machines, it was all people doing these jobs by hand. So, having more people available within the area, who can then care and do the conservation work that's needed could only improve the habitats that we're working for. … So it is a good idea. As long as those people realise the reason that they're coming here and what a gift it is for them to be able to live in such an area, then that could be only positive. What you don't want, is people coming out and going, "Oh, I now live in a lovely house in the middle of a forest, but I want a better view over there, so can we chop those trees down so that I can see that and let some more light in here?" No, no, this isn't for you, it's a bonus for you, you're here for the nature.

I: So housing for people who understand the idea…

P33: Yes, who are willing to put something back into the environment.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P33: I think I've got it all in there, don't I? Connectivity. That's the word.

I: Connectivity between…?

P33: Connectivity between everything here, from us sat here having this conversation, to the organisation and the way it links in with the rest of the community. Connectivity between the grasses and flowers, to the trees, to the birds, to the insects, to the butterflies, to the cows. To the fact that everything has an impact on everything else, so you've always got to remember what potential connective issues there could be further down the line.

Participant 34

I: How long have you been involved with Ruskin Land for?

P34: … I pondered this, I should've looked this up before you came… OK, I think about 5 years? Whenever I became a Director of the Guild, that's when I began being involved with Ruskin Land. … Oh, maybe more like 7 years... Anyway, five to seven years.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P34: Initially, because I was thinking of becoming a Director of the Guild of St. George. I had been asked and the first meeting they held after I was asked, but before I became Director, was held at St. George's Farm. Which had just become vacant because Jack, the old tenant, had recently died and they'd just retaken possession of it. And so, the meeting was being held there to begin to think about what we might want to do with Ruskin Land going forward, what we want to do with St. George's Farm. And it sort of went from there, in terms of being involved. Because I then did become a Director of the Guild and then, eventually, became the main Guild Director external to the Wyre involved in the Wyre things.

I: You've already partly answered my question about your role there, but since becoming a Director, what have you been doing there?

P34: It's differed a little bit over time. Initially, it was simply tramping around the landscape with John Iles at my side, pointing out things that he thought were exciting, and they were exciting. Explaining how tree management works and that sort of things. So, initially, it was very much as somebody who is observing and learning a bit about what was going on. It then began to become a little bit, I think from my perspective, being an external advocate, because the way the Guild was set up as a Board, though it has differed a bit recently… When I first joined the Board, most of the Directors were either based in Wyre and strongly linked to Wyre, or they were very strongly linked to the Sheffield side of things. So, either the Collection there or physically located there, and so, as discussion took place, they were often either seen as "Do resources go to the Wyre or do resources go to Sheffield." And I began to get involved as a kind of neutral party who, being a historical Victorianist type, very much associated with the Collection in Sheffield and passionate about that, but also seeing that there was a lot of positive things

going on in the Wyre too. And so, I became a sort of go-between of thoughts about where do we put expenses and so on. Which is partly why I then ended up volunteering to help with the HLF project, that was getting a bit… Fraught's not the word, but a lot of cooks in the kitchen working on different aspects of things, and it became clear it would be useful to have somebody who wasn't based in the Wyre and wasn't going to gain locally in any way from being involved, but could sort of step in and offer opinions about things. And so, I became the Director with a kind of external responsibility for the Wyre. And that must've been about 3 years ago now? Just before the HLF project started, whenever that would be in terms of time.

I: Summer…

P34: Yes, and it would've been probably about November, when I then became a little more involved than I had been. I was sitting in a meeting one day and I sort of said, "I'll put my hand up to get involved as an external set of eyes."

I: Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P34: … I think I'm probably the worst person you could ask that question of. Because, again, in terms of the Directors, I'm the one who was there by virtue of knowing about Ruskin anyway. What it has done, I suppose, is get me to think a little bit more about nuances of Ruskin and the environment, and how we try to translate that for the twenty-first century. How we think about things like what Ruskin has to say about architecture for example. And when he's talking about architecture, whether we're going to be… whether you're trying to preserve it or whether you're trying to reconstruct it, or whether you're trying to just let it go and naturally become what time would make it become, and those sort of debates around what should we do in terms of intervention. Similar kinds of principles apply when it comes to stewardship of the natural world as well: is it best to just let all the trees grow on and let nature take its course as it wants to—which is what the Guild had in effect done there for few generations—or whether good stewardship and ethical management of the land in Ruskinian terms might actually mean that you chop down some of the trees and allow for greater biodiversity to happen. And potentially allow for crafts people to be working on the land and retrain in older skills, and all that kind of thing. And so, what the Wyre did for me, I suppose, was

become a sort of a little experimental laboratory sitting there to watch things happen and see how do we think about Ruskin playing out in the twenty-first century, in ethical, sustainable kinds of ways. So, I don't think I've learned about Ruskin, but it's got me to think a bit more about Ruskin. And I suppose I've learnt a bit about some things like, I don't know, the Burne-Jones window… Things about some of the early settlers, which I've learned a bit about through Mark Frost's work, a bit through your work. So, expanding my knowledge of Ruskin and influence in that particular area as well. Whether it's learning more about Ruskin or not, I'm not quite sure…

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P34: That's a very broad question! … I feel fairly protective about Ruskin Land, I think that might be a way to put it. Over time, there has been a kind of relationship built where I care about what happens there and want to try and make sure that we are doing what we should be doing to… be as environmentally friendly as we can, while also being good for humanity and society. And the two, or that's three, prongs don't need to be in conflict, but quite often can be, let's say, rubbing against each other in awkward kinds of ways. And so I… care about it. The same principle applies to nature, I suppose. I mean, even just thinking about… Last time I was in Ruskin Land, I learnt that there are interesting humane traps for rats, something I didn't know existed. And last night I saw a rat running through my garden and I thought, "I wonder how I can get one of those humane rat things like John Iles had at St. George's Farm." And that's all part of that vision of nature, so knowing that… I don't object to rats that much actually, but knowing that most people do, the neighbours left to their own devices where I live, are going to call the rat man, who will come and poison the rats, which is not a nice way for rats to die. Whereas that humane thing they have at St. George's Farm strikes me as more ethical somehow. And so that becomes the whole picture of nature tied in and learning through Ruskin Land in interesting kinds of ways. …

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth." What is your opinion on that?

P34: … I think he's right, but I think people need more than that, I think Ruskin elsewhere would say that people need more than that as well. So, it's not just the

purity of air, water, earth and the elements, but there also needs to be a notion of beauty and human engagement added to that picture to actually have a true sense of what Ruskin says people *really* need to exist. And a sense of actively doing things in a useful kind of way. I think those are the things that Ruskin would say people need in order to exist.

I: Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you?

P34: Yes… [laughter]

I: You've already used a couple of times…

P34: It does. It's a very complex term, or at least a term that seems to shift meaning a lot in different environments. So… From my perspective, sustainability is, I think, always rooted in a sense of… being environmentally friendly, somehow. But also helping humanity to better their own existence. Or individuals within society to better their own existence, the two go hand in hand. There's always been a bit of tension with the notion of sustainability from a business perspective where it *can* mean environmentally friendly side of things, but it can also mean is the business doing well enough economically that it can continue to exist regardless of any ethical aspects. And from my perspective, sustainability *has* to involve the ethical.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land is special in any way? As an area, or a project?

P34: Again, there's layers to that. Part of what makes it special is the way it can function as an interesting experiment. Because we know the history of what's been done on the land, because we know aspects were left to their own devices for a long time, we know the history of it going back further in terms of rural industries that were taking place… It becomes a special place to then say, "OK, how can we take what it is now and look forward?" So, the biodiversity surveys that David Ingram has been leading on the land become an interesting example of that sort of thing. So it's special in that way. I think it's also something quite special in terms of the way Ruskin Land, the Guild through the Land Trust, have been trying to build a sense of community and the way in which people in the area have responded to this growing sense of community and the number of people who have decided to volunteer in whatever way. Partly driven by, I'm sure, the people who are already involved working there and each bringing a few in, but there's clearly also

something about the land itself, and the kinds of projects that are taking place on the land, that are very appealing to people. So that too is a special kind of thing.

I: What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P34: Oh that's a tough one… And begins to get us to the crux of what next, that's somewhat beginning to loom a bit…. So there was a board meeting a few years ago where… etched in my memory, sitting at the Art Workers' Guild in London, where Tim Selman had come along with John Iles, and were presenting about the notion of having a sawmill at Ruskin Land. And it was the most difficult Directors' Meeting that I've been at in the time I've been a Director of the Guild. Particularly because we at that point had some of the older Masters there as well; they had just began to serve as an advisory board, the idea was to make use of their knowledge and experience and value these elderly men, I think they were all in their 80s. And as the idea of the sawmill began to be discussed, it was very clear that they were all adamantly, utterly opposed to it. And in fact left quite upset. And the serving Directors were pretty split. I started the day opposed. And so, in the midst of that, and after a lot of discussion, we decided as sitting Directors, to unanimously support the idea of having a sawmill. Yes, it was going to create noise in the landscape, although I have to admit it wasn't going to be the huge sawmill that I was picturing as a Canadian girl. My vision of a sawmill was a rather different kind of thing… So, yes, it was going to create potential noise pollution, but there was a promise that this would not be by any means around the clock, nor even every week of the year. It would be as and when that was necessary, in order to properly steward the land and begin to be able to make use of the wood as well. So rather than, from an economic perspective, harvesting the wood and sending it all out each time, instead there would be the possibility to harvest the wood, but then make use of it by turning it into planks which you can then make into things and suddenly you're getting a much higher return for your woodlot economically. And, I suppose, we were very much swayed by the argument that the trees need to breathe and we need to take out quite a few of the trees in order to return the woodland to being the kind of woodland it once was and would love to be again in order to have the biodiversity which we want it to have as good stewards. And so, the sawmill became a good way to achieve that. That sort of takes us thorough that

side of the picture about one big decision about what to do at Ruskin Land. Before that, there was the earlier big decision about beginning to set up the Land Trust, although that's before I joined the Board. And what now is sort of looming is the what next of what you do with the space. I suppose an interim space has also happened when you've been watching Ruskin Land as well, when last summer Studio in the Woods took place, and suddenly new bits of infrastructure had to be built, whether it was the picnic site area or the eco outdoor toilets, which I'm not entirely convinced by… Areas for camping, sort of work out and so on. And that's another level towards potentially bringing people in and having things happen there and so on. So the next stage is, well a), the road needs working again, so there's gonna have to be a part of redevelopment of repairing that road which is now so rutted that…

I: Such a common theme, from the beginning of the settlement, we're now in 2019 and the track…

P34: And what you do with it I don't know… 'Cause, again, to just pave it in a formal kind of way seems wrong in that environment. Aesthetically it seems wrong. So, yeah. So the next major structural thing is probably going to be that track that needs to be adjusted again and potholes dealt with, again. But then, it's wider than that. So, I know that Tim at the Land Trust is very keen to very significantly redevelop the site, build more buildings, potentially have more craftspeople there, more other kinds of activities. … And I guess, that's gonna be the main, telling point. I think for the Land Trust, they probably need a certain amount of activity and so on there, in order to be economically viable and self-sustainable in that sense. But there begins to be a tension of if you have too many people and too much business and too much action happening there, have we gone a step too far beyond the initial sense of 'Yes, fine, we do need a sawmill and we do need a little bit more workable space. But do we really want to turn it into "Ruskinland" in the all-one-word sense of being like Disneyland kind of thing.' And I'm not sure. That's gonna need a lot of discussion. And my gut reaction today would be probably not… But again, there are cases to be made for what could be with it. Bigger isn't always better. There's my quote! [laughter]

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P34: No. But are there any things you'd like me to cover that I haven't?

I: Well, as Director for Education you haven't mentioned how you might see Ruskin Land as educational space…

P34: Well, at the moment, about all it does is occasionally bring small groups of, particularly young people to visit it, but very small numbers. And I suppose part of my… my concern in the midst of all that is that we're back to "Do we need that many people tramping through the space?" and potentially… undermining the peaceful tranquillity that would've been part of what Ruskin actually prized about it in the first place. The flip side of that is all the work that gets done in terms of the volunteers, who clearly are being trained up in doing a whole variety of things, whether it's how to make and put in a fence post or whether it's how do you herd cows that have got into the wrong field or… even the making of the picnic areas… All that kind of stuff that they're being trained in doing. So it works on that level, which is largely skills and craft kind of training. It becomes an interesting party piece to pull out in terms of "Here's Ruskin" and what we can learn in terms of the environment. There's been some talk of bringing potentially, say, masters students to do a bit of studies on the land in terms of environmental study. I don't think that's happened yet… There has been the students at the Architecture Department at Cardiff, although… the aesthetic of what they tended to create doesn't always exactly resonate with Ruskin or Ruskin Land… [laughter]

Participant 35

I: How long were you involved with Ruskin Land for?

P35: About four years.

I: What were your reasons for getting involved?

P35: [laughter] Happy accident really. I… We moved to the West Midlands, I'd been working in the conservation sector for 12 years or so, and both my wife and I were living in Buckinghamshire and were looking for new jobs. And Liz took on a job at Birmingham University, so we moved up to the West Midlands. My initial plan, we have two little ones, at the time they were 4 and 2, so my plan was, it was in April,

my plan was to be a house dad really and to look after the girls until the older one started school in September, and the go part-time for a little while and see how things worked out. And it was… my wife was on a train, coming home from work, it was not her… [laughter] I'm surprised John hasn't told you this actually. She was on a train home from work, it was her not normal train 'cause she was working a bit later, and John Iles was on the train going to a some sort of dinner or something in Worcester. Which is not his normal train either. She just happened to sit down next to him and, 'cause she's a nosy cow, she was reading what he was doing on his laptop and it was about conservation grazing. I think he was responding to the invitation to the BBC Food and Farming Awards. So she just rudely interrupted him and said… We'd literally only just, we'd probably been about a month if that in the West Midlands. So she just said, "I'm really sorry, tell me to bugger off if I'm being rude, but we'd just moved to the area, my husband's involved in the sorts of work that you're writing about, we're trying to find out what's going on, he's looking for work." So John gave her his card and said come up the farm. I went up the farm and we had a chat and he said, "You sound like a handy bloke, what you looking for?" And I said I'd like some paid work, I'd like to be part-time, it has to be regular 'cause I've got two little kids and got to sort out childcare, you can't switch it on and off if you don't have family locally. And I'm looking to start work in September-October, when my first one goes to school, so obviously that would reduce cost. And he said how much do you wanna earn, and I said, "Right now, I'd be quite happy with costs of childcare and petrol." So he said come up the farm, have a couple of days' work and see how you get on. And one thing led to another, I started doing a day a week, then two days a week, then three days a week, then he said, "Do you wanna run it?" [laughter] So it was just really a happy accident.

I: Would you say that your role changed over the years?

P35: Oh very much so. When I first started with the Community Land Trust, it was… Has John given you the background as how he got this going?

I: Yes.

P35: So, John had already got the CLT set up, it was something he had a vision for, as I understand it, sort of grow a bit, but it wasn't… He wasn't quite sure where it was going, rather that it was about grazing and restoring orchards and he'd got a

couple of grants. We had, I don't know, 40 acres maybe, half a dozen cows. We had some grants to put in some trees and to do a few other bits and pieces. And Natural England wanted us to expand that and increase the service, so we were grazing some land for NE, grazing some of the neighbours' land: people who'd bought the view or people who were no longer able to look after their smallholding, etc. There were SSSI, so they had to be managed but there wasn't really a mechanism to do so, they're not really commercially viable, so John had this idea that he could create some sort of enterprise that provided a land management service to meet those broader ecological objectives and also supported community. And I just turned up at the beginning of it. I had a lot of experience with livestock and trees and that side of stuff, so it was a nice fit. And I think in the 4 years that I was there… Well, when I left, we had 400-odd acres, 50 head cattle, some pigs in the woods. There was a little juicing business that spun off, we were running lots of volunteer days, bit of forestry work… All sorts really, it was good fun! My intention was to have a day or a couple of days a week being a house dad, going out doing some practical work in the countryside, maybe putting some fences up, checking cattle and stuff. And in the end I was running a farm with 60 fields… We had 64 fields, we had 6 HLS… About 400 acres, 24 sites, 14 landowners I think. And we used to take the cows round, graze the fields, repair fences, put water troughs in and infrastructure back, plant trees… And try and sell some beef. And really anything that came up, you just said "Yes" so that you could make it all hang together. Built the barn, you've seen the barn at Bewdley? So, we built that, it was good fun. It was used to mill the timber on the Farm, had a mobile sawmill come in. Yeah, it was a really creative time, it was great.

.....

I: **Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land?**

P35: Only very vaguely. My wife has got a passing interest in arts. When I first met her, she had a load of, one of things I remember about when I first met her was that she had a lot of mugs with a lot of the pre-Raphaelites printed on them. And I remember looking at them thinking they were quite interesting and unusual and so just through conversations with her I heard of Ruskin. I didn't really know anything about him. I suppose, culturally, I'm a bit of a… I didn't have a very cultured

upbringing, shall we say. Music and art and stuff like that wasn't really in our vocabulary. I mean, I like art, I've always enjoyed art and since I'd been married, my wife's influence obviously, she likes art, so we have lots of original paintings around the house and we often go to galleries and stuff, but it's something that I've developed over time, it's not something that I grew up with.

I Would you say that your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

P35: Oh yeah, massively. I remember John giving a presentation about it, not long after I started, to people, about his journey sort of starting the Farm and the CLT, and the connections with Ruskin… My background is very much about sustainability and I'm very much a hands-on, practical sort of person as well and so a lot of what came from it, resonated. I do find it fascinating, it's like a lot of great thinkers in the past, a lot of their ideas and their thoughts are timeless, from Shakespeare through to Aristotle. Ruskin resonated, I definitely understood where he was coming from, my limited understanding of Ruskin, and I very much enjoyed being a part of it. I'm not very involved with the Ruskin, with the Guild, I do go along to the AGM and I do enjoy all the talks and stuff. I don't read Ruskin widely, I've read a few bits and pieces, I've read about him, but… I've got so many other things to do [laughter] it's not high on my priority list. That's not to say that I don't really enjoy the involvement I have with it, and it has certainly broadened my cultural understanding and connections that he made around the craftsmanship stuff and the understanding of nature. And some of the drawings are superb. And I love also the inspiration that it's given some of the other projects that I've seen, work in Sheffield… And also some of the artistic stuff, some of the paintings and pictures that've been inspired by him, I think they're brilliant.

I: Why did you become a Companion? I'm asking because WCLT employees don't tend to be Companions…

P35: I don't know… I didn't really know about the Guild until John mentioned it. I was firstly of course introduced to Ruskin and Ruskin Land and the Guild's ownership of the Farm, 'cause you can't not be involved in the WCLT and not. I didn't really know about Companionship and being a member of the charity, I'm not typically a member of a charity. I've worked for charities all my life, I've always

kind of avoided being a member as well, I think they got enough of my life without having my membership fees as well [laughter]. But John mentioned Companionship and explained what it was and, I suppose, for me particularly, John has always been a real inspiration and… the opportunity to get a better understanding of how Ruskin Land came about and about the Farm, about the history of it interested me. Piqued my interest and I thought what's there to lose, why would you not want to be involved. It is so, I suppose, intrinsic to how the CLT, what the CLT is about, it seemed to me to be almost something that… It wasn't really a question, does that make sense? It was the obvious, you know, why would you question it. I suppose that's why, everyone's different. Also, going back to my comments earlier about my cultural upbringing, through… Liz and I had been together for about 10 years before moving to West Midlands… My interest in broader culture had increased, my social awareness, my social conscience, moral compass–whatever you wanna call it. My horizons had broadened quite significantly and, not just through Liz, but through a range of different influences, through my work, etc., I suppose it just resonated, the Guild resonated.

I: Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth". What is your opinion on that?

P35: Yeah… I suppose you can compare that with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, couldn't you. We need shelter as well… It's a complicated time, we all need the basics. Some of Ruskin's things I suppose you could question. One of the… I remember talking to someone, you know, "There's no wealth but life" and I remember somebody saying to me, "That's really easy when you've got it." [laughter] You know? It's an easy thing to say when you're wealthy. And I've often reflected on that comment and I know many people who aren't wealthy who are very happy. And I often feel that wealth just makes being miserable easier, which I suppose is a different take on Ruskin's thoughts. I don't know if that answers your question… Fundamentally, at the end of the day… I mean, you only have to look at Extinction Rebellion and all the stuff that's happening to climate right now, is that actually, a clean environment fundamentally the most important thing. We have intelligence and we have resilience, we have innovation, we have creativity. If we've got a clean environment, we can create the things that we need to be happy and to

live. But without them, we're fucked, in all honesty. Yeah, I suppose he's got a point, doesn't he.

I: What does the word "sustainability" mean to you?

P35: That's an interesting one actually, 'cause it's being challenged recently. I suppose, part of my education is the three pillars of sustainability, you know, environment, economic, social. Interestingly, Wales has got an act called the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act–I work in Wales now–and they've also introduced the idea of Culture. I think culture is just a subset of society, but there we go. I suppose what they're talking about is understanding who we are now is understanding where we've come from. Sustainability is about that, isn't it. Ultimately, it's about trying to find a balance between all three. Again, underpinned by, first and foremost, it's gotta be environmental sustainability. Because without it, there isn't an economy, and without it, in the long term, there isn't going to be an economy and there isn't going to be a society, given all the stuff in the press at the moment…It's about… the Bruntland Report I think, was the first definition of "sustainability," around having what you need for your generation without compromising the needs of future generations, isn't it. There are many more intelligent people and much thought given to the concept of sustainability than I… I can put my spin on it and trying to decide what it is for myself [laughter]. I suppose my understanding comes from the Rio Conference 1992 I think it was, and my education around that kind of stuff. So very much the three pillars of sustainability… Funny enough, I suppose my involvement with WCLT really was a catalyst for me starting up a social enterprise in east Yorkshire. So when we left West Midlands, again with my wife's work, to go to Hull, she got a job at Hull University and I started a social enterprise called Rooted in Hull. It's very much embedded in the concept of sustainability around food, the environment, community, but also as a business. One of the things that John really taught me, was the need to have a business that was financially sustainable. One of the big problems with the charity sector, generally, is, the environmental sector, is this kind of… And I suppose a lot of charities are in the same boat, is not inherently a model which creates income through delivering what it does. It doesn't generate money. And as a result, you're at the mercy at the boom and bass cycle of grants, grant

funders deciding at a whim that they will change their particular ideas about what they like doing, or they want to see new ideas because they get bored instead of recognising that there's some really good stuff out there, but it isn't inherently something which will generate income so it has to be grant-funded in the long term and it doesn't want to be constantly reinventing itself to fit some idea that's come up in another part of the country or even another part of the planet. One of the things that we try to do in Rooted is try and, much like CLT, is to try and create some trading element to recognise the value of what we're doing beyond simply selling lettuces and tomatoes… In that it's perhaps contributing to people's mental health. There's a huge movement in something called Ecosystem Services, I don't know if you're familiar with the term… Ecosystem Services is a concept where we understand the environment in its… A lot of people don't like it because it's about valuing the environment in terms of money, so how much carbon does a tree absorb and what economic value can you put on that; if you plant a woodland in a flood catchment, does it prevent a certain amount of flooding and therefore you can put a value on that whether it's money-saving clearing up after flooding or… So peat logs and cleaning water. So you can, there's been a huge amount of academic research on what… For instance, trees in an urban environment improve people's mental health, increase house values, all the rest of it. So what is the financial value of that and trying to get people to invest or recognise and therefore pay for functioning natural systems in the environment. So there's a lot of stuff that I've been involved in in the last few years round ecosystem services. So it's about trying to look at… In Rooted in Hull it's very much piloting and trying to understand and unpick, and get to generate income from delivering environmental gain, but spinning it on its head a bit. Very much like what John was doing with the Care Farming and social forestry and all those sorts of things. How do you experiment and try and… I don't like the word 'monetize' but I'm gonna use it: to monetize those things that you're doing essentially trying to create an more ecologically, or environmentally sustainable world, but through demonstrating the economic value of it and therefore getting return on it, rather than being reliant on these kind of grants. Does that make sense?

I: How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

P35: Ruskin Land is an easy one. It's a very special place for me. I go back every year at least once a year. As a human being I am growing all the time, emotionally, intellectually, as well as physically ageing, and it was an important period of my life, in terms of how I see myself now. It's a very special place for lots of reasons: because of John; because of what I achieved there; because of how I… understanding the influences that Ruskin had on me and my thinking of things differently… And I wouldn't say I'm a born again Ruskinite or anything like that, but just in terms of the influence that it's had. It's a very special place ecologically; from a landscape perspective; because of the influence of what the WCLT has tried to achieve which is unique, innovative and different. It's something that hasn't been done anywhere else, it's really, I think a lot of accolade went to John and the CLT from Natural England and others in terms of what we were achieving there in terms of trying to deliver something really difficult which people had been struggling with a long time. And people had been struggling across the country with similar problems. So there are so many reasons why Ruskin Land is a very special place. The Wyre Forest is a fabulous landscape… I suppose it's unique, there are similar aspects in other parts of the country, I'm not far from the Forest of Dean and there are some similar issues here, but it is different. So the Wyre Forest is wonderful, absolutely just a magical place really. I mean there's lots of other reasons why it's wonderful as well: my kids had a great time, they started 4 and 2 and we left when they were 6 and 8 and they had a great time coming to the Farm and feeding lambs and seeing pigs and riding in a tractor and all that. I mean, it was a great opportunity for little ones. It was a special time. Nature… It's interesting actually, I remember discussing my interest in nature… In my early career, my first job was a ranger in a country park and… Or was it even my first degree… I did a degree in environmental studies, by a happy accident I fell into it. I didn't know where I was going as a young man, like a lot of people, and I actually realised – it was either during my degree in my first job—actually how embedded nature was in my psyche. I got into nature through fishing. I was a really keen coarse fisherman and when I was little, we used to go out in my dad's boat and go fishing in the [inaudible]. Not that we ever caught much but it was just that kind of… And we were talking about it now, you know, the benefits of nature on people's mental health and well-being,

growing up around nature playing in the woods and streams and fishing and all, I suppose it gives you a love of it even if you don't really understand it. And as I feel into it through my first degree, which was, again, a happy accident, and I started to get an understanding and an appreciation of it in a more intellectual way, a deeper understanding of it. And so it's part of me, it's an absolutely fundamental part of me, so it was there before I got to the Wyre. And all the time it's just building, my work has been environmentally-driven all of my working life, since my first degree really. It's kind of who I am, what I do.

I: Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community?

P35: Yeah, very much so, and I think it does. I don't know… How long have I been away now, 6 years? I was there 4… It's difficult to know, I wasn't… I was becoming part of the community, but I was never, obviously never lived there… It can be difficult to see how more it could be, what the opportunities are. But I think it certainly is, I can't say how much, but it was certainly growing while I was there. When I was there, it was quite early days, we were sort of developing ideas. And there are different types of community of course. You're talking about the local community, I guess you're talking about the local population within Bewdley. But there are many different types of community that it is part of and it creates its own community as well, the volunteers no doubt come from Kidderminster, we've had people from Wolverhampton and all sorts. And they all create their own community albeit geographically different. But they create community as well as being part of the local community.

I: Are there any future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

P35: It's always a tricky one because the question is whether it's my place to say… I do talk to John and Tim when I see them, but it's difficult without really understanding where they are now to be able to give a perspective on what I'd like them to do. The one thing that I always worry about is the grazing side of it. It was always quite a challenge and I was quite keen… What they'd done with the forestry and the woodland is brilliant, I think it's absolutely superb and I'd love to see that grow more. My worry has always been the grazing side, because it is a really challenging thing to do. It is relentless. I worry that it's not sufficiently productive and I would like to see that, I suppose, get more efficient? But it's an incredibly

difficult thing to do, there are a lot of constraints and a lot of challenges. When I left it was a kind of a manic period, those 4 years I was there, we were growing rapidly, we took on a huge amount of land, we were trying to develop a herd and it really was flying by the seat of our pants. And it was great fun, but I was always conscious that we needed to… We were getting to the point, I remember having a conversation about it with John, about trying to consolidate and organise and get a better structure to it. And one of my, one of the things I did when I left, was to bring together some of that planning to help Sally in her role, getting an animal grazing plan and look at trying to consolidate and have a nucleus of a breeding herd, so that we could have animals that weren't being pushed for grazing all the time and they had a more controlled environment to manage the breeding. Which would have helped with the economics of it. I don't know if that really, I don't think that really managed to develop and I would like to have seen that develop more strongly. I know Tim was working on a bit of a plan for the grazing side of things, I haven't see it, I don't know what it is.

.....

I would like them to get some land, and in some ways I thought St. George's Farm would have been a good opportunity for it, which is going back to the cattle side of things. You need somewhere which is less precious, to give you the space to… You need somewhere where you've got capacity to, particularly livestock, and it's a problem with… conservation grazing throughout the country has the same problem, where do you have the space for your nucleus herd or where you can bring animals if you've got… Like last year was a killer of a summer, really dry, you need somewhere, some people talk about "sacrificial land", I don't like "sacrificial" because it would suggest you don't care about it or you can trash it. Other people use the term "layback land", it's somewhere where you can just draw back to. There's a bit of that in Jenny Robbins' land which provides the winter relief, but you almost need somewhere for the core nucleus of cattle. And I always thought that St. George's Farm would've been a good place for that because it was relatively low value ecologically, but obviously there was a desire from the Guild and Natural England to get that land back into similar to Uncllys and to Bowcastle. I always thought that would've been a nice option, but there are other places around and

about. Getting another holding which would allow them to be more commercial in their cattle management. And I don't mean commercial in a more intensive sense, but I mean in terms of getting it functioning beyond just the grazing system. I don't know, I love some of the stuff they're doing with the architects, the arts, bits and bobs, the woodland. I think it's all brilliant really. It's difficult. In many ways, I'm just happy that it's still going along, it continues to be successful. I understand how projects morph and change because of particular needs, etc. I think that's enough for me.

I: When you were there, did you feel involvement from the Guild?

P35: There was always that, you could feel there was that underpinning of interest from the Guild, I mean obviously Cedric next door at Bowcastle and his involvement in, his relationship with John and the discussions we would have around the future of the Farm and what we were trying to achieve. Obviously I'd see other Directors 2-3 times a year because they would be visiting the Farm or AGM or other reasons, and they would… Clive Wilmer particularly was always just interested to find out, have a chat, just an awareness of what was going on. The fact that they funded… They weren't an entirely silent partner. [some organisations are very silent and some want to know all the details] If you put them on a spectrum, the Guild is more on the Rank side of the spectrum, but there's a guiding hand there, the principles of Ruskin are there. I suppose a lot of that comes through John, but just their involvement, the fact that they've been… I've been asked to speak at meetings, there are annual events at the Farm. There's involvement and there's a care. But equally, you don't want them too involved [laughter]. It's about valuing, you feel valued because your expertise is valued, your knowledge is valued and they want you to get on and do a good job, and they don't want to interfere in a way which is… They don't have that expertise. So it would be wrong of them to interfere. I think it's nice, they show a care and interest, but they value who you are and what you're doing and they see that you're doing a good job and they let you get on with it. You couldn't want for a better relationship.

I: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

P35: No… Other than it was the most fascinating and wonderful part of my life really. Still is.

5. Reflexivity: Researcher's Self-interview

How long have you been (or were) involved with Ruskin Land for?

DW: I've been involved for a little over 3 years.

What were your reasons for getting involved?

DW: I was beginning a PhD project about Ruskin Land and so I began visiting the Wyre Forest to keep up with what was going on and absorb knowledge about the place.

How would you describe your role here?

DW: Inquisitive researcher interrupting people's work and following them as they went about their lives. I was occasionally trying to be useful and went out with the volunteers to help with conservation tasks, but I'm not sure I did any good there.

Had you heard of Ruskin before starting at Ruskin Land? In what ways has your involvement at Ruskin Land enhanced your understanding of Ruskin?

DW: Well yes and no. I knew of Ruskin and his Utopian vision before arriving at Ruskin Land, because I researched that for my PhD proposal. But I had very little, if any, knowledge of Ruskin before I started thinking about doing the project. So yes, this project has taught me a lot about Ruskin and how his ideals have been implemented, but I'm only at the beginning of getting to know Ruskin's work really.

How do you feel about Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest and nature in general?

DW: It is very hard to put succinctly. I have some wonderful memories from Ruskin Land and have thoroughly enjoyed my visits there and feel very privileged to have been allowed into people's lives and homes and I'm very happy that my research involved getting out into the fresh air and doing some practical things. The Wyre Forest is a beautiful place that I had not heard of at all before starting this project. I would like to return when all this is over and spend some time exploring the bits that are not Ruskin Land or its immediate neighbourhood. I come from a different "forest background" and can't avoid comparing the Wyre to what I'm used to... Poland has a bigger and denser forest cover and we have big areas of ancient woodland that's completely inaccessible to humans, and we have wildlife that's majestic and dangerous: bison, wolves, bears, boar... It can be dangerous if you get lost in a forest, especially in the mountains. There are also more tree species and definitely more undergrowth in Polish forests than there are in the Wyre and there are still tiny little

villages that are much more remote and far away from the next town than Ruskin Land ever was from Bewdley. And it's also quite normal to forage for food such as berries and wild mushrooms, this can be quite fun but you need to know what you're doing or else... Generally, in Poland you can still feel small compared to nature. I get really angry when I hear about new governmental schemes to cut down trees or allow more hunting because I know that all this is done for profit and has nothing to do with trees or animals being ill. That's the sad reality in Poland...

How do I feel about nature... I don't know how to explain how deeply embedded it is in my soul. I grew up in big cities, but I went to the country a lot as a child and I spent a lot of time in my grandparents' garden and on their allotment (which is another thing different to the UK! Our allotments are huge and everyone has cottages on them)... My great-grandfather was a gamekeeper on a big forest estate and I grew up with stories of forest farm life, my grandfather was a great storyteller and told me all about his life there as a boy. I especially liked his stories about animals, because I love animals and have always wanted to work with them... So how do I feel about nature? In short, I like being outside and need to be outside to feel OK mentally.

Ruskin said that people need three material things to live: "pure Air, Water, and Earth" (*Works*, 1906 27.90). What is your opinion on that?

DW: I know he said more than that and context is needed. I am a little torn... Ultimately, these are the only things we need to create everything else we might require and I agree that we need them clean if they are to sustain us. But I feel that Ruskin had very little imagination, or empathy at least. Creating shelter, warmth and food from these three is hard work. Ruskin never had to experience that. However, I really like his idea, growing out of the "pure Air, Water, and Earth" that people should have basic skills such as the ability to grow and cook food, clothe oneself or make—or at least mend—some household objects. We're losing those skills at an alarming rate.

Does the word "sustainability" mean anything to you? If so, what?

DW: I think my understanding of, or attitude to that word, changed over the years... I have memories from my childhood of very small-scale campaigning for more trees and less pollution and being concerned over water use, so my interest in sustainability is not new. But I don't think I used the word then... I think what it means

to me now is understanding people's impact on the planet and living in a way that reduces it, so that we don't destroy the world. Frankly, I don't care what happens to humanity, we're free to destroy ourselves through our own actions, but we have no right to take the planet with us. So, sustainability in my everyday life is all about the choices I make—and there's quite a lot of guilt there about not doing enough or making wrong choices ha ha!

What are your main objectives at Ruskin Land? Why do you think this area is special?

DW: My main objective was to find out about the history of the place and its reality compared to Ruskin's theory from *Fors Clavigera*. Now, after three years of research, I think the area is special because it's one of very few communities inspired by Utopians that have survived, but it's not a curiosity or a relic of a bygone era or an open-air museum, but has adapted and reinterpreted the principles on which it was founded and extracted the essence.

Do you think Ruskin Land has a role to play in the local area/community? If yes, what?

DW: Leadership by example perhaps. But mostly, it's about making people want to care about their environment.

What future directions would you like to see Ruskin Land develop?

DW: This is actually a very difficult question, considering I've been studying the land and the project for three years... After this time and speaking to many of those involved—at various levels—I feel some unity of vision and understanding of it is missing. It's not that there isn't a vision, it's just that there is no one common vision or it's not disseminated well enough. Both the Guild and the WCLT have visions and, although the organisations share Directors, etc., those visions seem to differ slightly and this lack of unity seeps through to the volunteers, some of whom perhaps would like to understand exactly what Ruskin Land is about... I think this will probably come, it's only early days really, but that's what's noticeable to me. And perhaps it's part of life of anywhere where there are "many cooks"... But, I wonder sometimes if the Guild and the WCLT know exactly what they want Ruskin Land to be and if they are clear with each other about this...

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what nature, Ruskin Land or anything else we have discussed means to you?

DW: Just that I have loved every minute of this project, even when I was cold, ill, alone and snowed in at Uncllys.